

How Will We Finish? • Galatians 3:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Cake Mix*

1. A leading food manufacturer developed a new cake mix some years ago that required only water to be added.
2. Tests were run, surveys were made, and the cake mix was found to be of superior quality to other mixes
3. It tasted good, was easy to use, and made a moist, tender cake.
4. The company spent large sums of money on an advertising campaign and then released the cake mix to the general market.
5. But few people bought it
6. So the company spent more money on surveys to find out why it sold so poorly
7. Based on the results of that survey, the company recalled the mix, reworked the formula, and released the revised mix
8. This time it sold like mad
9. Here's what they did differently
10. They simply required that water & AN EGG be added to the mix
11. You see, the first mix was just *too simple*
12. People couldn't believe that something worth while could be so simple
13. Certainly, they reasoned, it had to take more work to get a decent result

B. *More This Week*

1. This week we're returning to the same topic we looked at last Sunday
2. The reason why is because this is something that figures centrally in the life of faith
3. There are few truths that we would be better served to reaffirm than the fact that we are saved by grace through faith, apart from works of merit, apart from observance of the Law

II. TEXT

A. *Vs. 1-3*

- {1} **O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?**
- {2} **This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**
- {3} **Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?**
1. This is some of the strongest writing Paul ever penned.
 2. But he was in a battle,
 - a. the outcome of which was vitally important not only to the believers in Galatia,

- b. but to the whole future of the movement called "Christianity"
- 3. Paul was out to prove that salvation is by grace alone, and not by the works of the law
- 4. The false teachers he was denying had used every possible means of seducing the Galatians with their error
- 5. So Paul ,being the expert debater he was, laid out an air-tight case for the Gospel of Christ by using their very own arguments against them
- 6. He has 6 points in chapters 3 & 4
 - a. and the first is found in vs. 1-5 of chapter 3
 - b. it's the argument based on their *personal experience* with Christ when they were first saved.
- 7. Now, to argue from experience can be dangerous
 - a. because all experiences are not necessarily based in truth
 - b. experiences can be counterfeited and misunderstood
 - c. but when experience is rooted on the objective standard of God's Word,
 - d. it is a powerful and personal thing that cannot be gainsaid
- 8. Paul had been the original messenger of the Gospel to the Galatians
- 9. He had preached the Word and the Galatians had responded with great sincerity and openness.
- 10. God had verified the message and their conversion with signs and wonders
- 11. And the change affected in their lives had been so dramatic it had shaken the entire region
- 12. So Paul asks . . .

B. V. 1

{1} O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?

- 1. It's no mystery what the content of Paul's message had been when he first came to Galatia
- 2. It was the same as in every other place he went: JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED
- 3. Paul said that his preaching had been so plain, so public, that they had actually had the picture of the cross painted for them
- 4. How was it that they, who had so clearly seen and understood the gospel could now be turning away to something else?
- 5. It was almost like they were under a spell!
- 6. But it was no spell - they were merely being foolish, unthinking, spiritually dull
- 7. You may remember that I said the Galatians were not known for being a thinking people
 - a. intellectual pursuits were not their strong point
 - b. philosophy held little interest for them
 - c. they were a rough and tumble people - always ready for action
 - d. this is one of the reasons the message of the Judaizers was appealing to them
 - e. it spoke to their desire to be *doing* something

8. Paul calls them *foolish* because they were drawing conclusions based on arguments which they should have known better than to entertain
9. Very simply - THEY KNEW BETTER!
10. There is little more frustrating to a mother or father than to find out that their child has done something they had just a short time before told them not to do
 - a. the immediate question is: don't you have a brain?
 - b. didn't we just talk about this - how could you be so foolish?
 - c. that is Paul's meaning here
11. It was utterly foolish for the Galatians to turn aside from the Gospel of Grace when Jesus' work on their behalf had been so clearly presented and so readily received by them

C. V. 2

{2} This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

1. Paul pictures himself as present in their midst
 - a. the Galatians and the Judaizers who were misleading them are all standing around
 - b. and they are all talking, each one presenting their evidence for why after we are saved by faith we have to go on to maturity by the Law
 - c. Paul raises his hands and quiets them
 - d. and he says, "Okay - Tell me one thing. Answer me just one question: When you were first saved, did you receive the Spirit of God by faith, or by obeying the Law of Moses?"
 - e. the answer of course was obvious - by faith!
2. The real evidence of conversion is the presence of the Holy Spirit
3. And they had received the Spirit by faith, not works
4. So, if they began in the Spirit, could they then go on to maturity *without* Him?
5. Human children need two human parents to be *conceived*,
 - a. and once conceived nothing need be added -
 - b. all they need is nourishment to attain maturity
6. The believer needs two *spiritual* parents to be *converted*,
 - a. the Word of God & the Spirit of God
 - b. these two work in concert to produce life
 - c. and nothing else need be added
 - d. all the believer requires for maturity is *spiritual* nourishment
7. So Paul now asks a vitally important question:

D. V. 3

{3} Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

1. Can they really be so unthinking, so spiritually dull as to think that what the Spirit began by faith they now themselves could bring to completion by their own self-effort and keeping the Law?
2. You can't say it any more clearly or powerfully than Paul does here:

Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

E. Our Church

1. Last Sunday, as we look at this same passage, we applied it to our lives *individually*
2. And I rejoice to see the way the Spirit of God is at work in so many to apply what we find here
3. Indeed, it seems that many of us are being deeply challenged by our studies in Galatians
4. But this morning, I want to apply Paul's challenge and question to us as a *church*.
5. Calvary Chapel began as a sovereign move of God's Spirit
 - a. I did not want to start a church in Oxnard
 - b. Lynn & I started a home bible study, and before we knew it, it had outgrown our house and a bible study format
 - c. what happened in the founding of Calvary Oxnard is clear evidence of God's leading
6. Over the years we have grown
 - a. it's not been explosive growth
 - b. it's been a slow steady expansion
 - c. and we have learned so much
7. But now we are at a place in our life as a church where we are facing a time of growth that may well take us past any thing we could have imagined in those early days
8. And as we grow, we are faced with a multitude of new challenges
 - a. occasionally people ask us to go here and do this or that
 - b. we are facing new pressure to join up with other groups and organizations
 - c. we are confronted with the need to look at our current ministries and find new ways of doing things
 - d. in all the changes and challenges before us we have to ask ourselves what Paul asked the Galatians

Having begun in the Spirit, are we now being made perfect by the flesh?

- e. are we being seduced by *professionalism*?
- f. are *policies* being elevated over *people*?
- g. has *form* become more important to us than *function*?
9. In order to attract more people are we given to pursuing what's *popular*?
10. In order to hang on to those who already come, are we anxious to find what's *novel* and *new*?
11. If Paul were writing this letter to us, would he read our bulletin, listen to our announcements and after sitting in a week's worth of services pen the words,
"O foolish Oxnardians, who has bewitched you? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?"
12. I hope and pray not!
13. Friends, we need to heed these words and ask them of ourselves
14. What are we depending on? *Who* are we depending on?

F. Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

1. I recently picked up a book that has been recommended to me by a couple of other pastors
2. It's titled, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, by Jim Cymbala
3. It's the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle of which Jim is the pastor
 - a. 25 years ago, they had barely 20 people
 - b. today, over 6,000 attend & have planted many daughter churches
 - c. but it is not the numbers that should cause us to take notice
 - d. it's what the Brooklyn Tabernacle *is doing* that we must pay attention to
4. Very simply, what they are doing is what we read the church did in the NT
 - a. they preached the Word of God
 - b. and they gave themselves to prayer
5. I challenge you to read through the first 15 chapters of the Book of Acts this next week and notice what the church did
 - a. they met together to hear the Apostles teach on the life of Jesus
 - b. they got together in small groups to encourage one another
 - c. and they prayed!
 - d. in fact, whenever the church ran into a problem, whenever they were beset with a challenge, we find them praying
 - e. they were *always* praying
 - f. and it says they prayed TOGETHER
 - g. they lifted up their voices and hearts in one accord
 - h. their prayer meetings were not the formal kind of things we see today
 - i. the people got together, and they prayed, all at one time
 - j. again and again, they called on the Lord
 - k. and you know what, God heard and answered their prayers
6. The church today is better organized, educated, and way more wealthy than that early church
7. But it is hardly more effective and powerful
8. They were accused by the civil authorities of turning the world *upside down*
9. Today, the church can't even turn *itself around!*
10. Jim Cymbala found himself the pastor of the Brooklyn tabernacle almost by accident
 - a. it was a church in trouble
 - b. and no matter what he did, things only got worse
 - c. in desperation he called out to God for help
 - d. and in reply, the Lord impressed on him the need to take the few who were left, and lead them in prayer, calling on God to help them
11. He shared this with them and told them that prayer was the engine that from that day forward would drive the church
12. A visiting minister from Australia just happened to be present that morning, and Jim asked him to say a word
 - a. that man got up and said these profound words:
 - b. "You can tell how popular a church is by who shows up on Sunday morning. You can tell how popular the pastor or evangelist is by who shows up on Sunday evening. But you can tell how popular Jesus is by

- who comes to the prayer meeting."
13. As that small handful of people began to seek God and call on His name for everything, the church began to see some dramatic things
 - a. slowly but surely the neighborhood around them was being transformed
 - b. drug dealers, prostitutes, and gang members were converted
 - c. new ministries were birthed
 - d. and the church grew
 - e. but most importantly, their weekly Tuesday evening prayer meeting grew even more
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- d. and the more they prayer, the more they saw the Lord move in power
 14. At Calvary Chapel, we have a reputation of being a teaching ministry
 - a. we are known for our solid exposition of the scriptures
 - b. people know that they will hear a relevant word that will touch their lives
 - c. but there is something we need to *add* to this reputation
 - d. and that is that we are a praying church where the power of God is being manifest
 15. We need to get out of the habit of doing the typical Sunday morning church *thing*, and get into the habit of meeting on Sunday mornings to *be* the Church!
 16. And here is what the book of Acts and Paul's letter to the Galatians tells us the Church is: It is a group of people who by faith look to Jesus Christ and call upon His name

G. The Limits Of Teaching

1. I am going to say something now that I don't want anyone to misunderstand
2. I love the Word of God and it will never lose it's place of primacy in my ministry
3. I think you all know that I am called to be a teacher and that I love to teach
4. So please understand what I am about to say in this context:
5. We have made the sermon, the study, the centerpiece of our meetings
6. But what ought to be the centerpiece, the heart, the focus of our services?
7. The Throne of Grace!
8. I like the way Jim Cymbala puts it,

"The scriptures are not so much the goal as they are an arrow that points us to the life-changing Christ. Teaching sound doctrine is a *prelude* to the supernatural. It's a guide, a set of boundaries to keep emotion and exuberance within proper channels"

9. Are we so worried about exuberance and overblown emotion that we have sequestered the Holy Spirit right out of the church?
10. If so, then we are as errant as the fanatics
11. You see, it is always Satan's tendency to push us to one extreme or the other
 - a. either he will tempt us to *fanaticism*
 - b. or toward *deadness*
12. My great concern at this time in my life and in the history of the movement known as Calvary Chapel is that we have so long and loudly emphasized the

- Word that we have unconsciously *de-emphasized* prayer
13. In our vehement affirmation of sound doctrine, we have defaulted to a denial of the Spirit of Truth
 14. In His letter to the Church of Ephesus, Jesus commends them for their faithfulness to sound doctrine and how they had refused the error of false teachers
 15. But His rebuke of their dead formalism was so strong it is shocking
 16. Here was a church that was right - but it was DEAD right!
 17. I will never forsake my calling to teach the Word of God and to do so with all my might
 18. But I must confess to you as your pastor, that I have failed you in leading us to call on the Name of the Lord
 19. By His grace, I want to change
 20. I want to see our whole church change
 21. I want to see Calvary as a movement change
 22. On Sundays and Wednesdays when we gather, instead of prayer being merely a formality we sprinkle here and there - let's sincerely pray!
 23. Let's call on the name of the Lord together!
 24. When people visit, let them see us really being the Church, calling on the Lord, and not merely show them a church *service*
 25. While prayer meetings can be and are a good thing, I do not want to separate prayer out of our regular services
 26. Prayer is a part of who and what we are
 27. So from now on, at the conclusion of our services, I am going to ask that you lift up your voice and call on the Lord
 - a. talk to Him out loud or quietly in your heart about what He has been speaking to your about through the message
 - b. call out to Him about some special need - some loved one or friend who is lost and needs Him
 - c. pray for our Church, that God's power would be released on all of us
 28. It's been well said that if you have only the Word, you *dry up*.
Only the Spirit and you *blow up*
But if you have both the Word & the Spirit, you *grow up*!
 29. It is the Spirit who has begun the work in us, working as He did through the Word
 30. The only way we can go on to maturity in Christ is by the Spirit continuing to work through the Word
 31. It's time for us to look to the Lord and expect Him to move powerfully among us
 32. He is still God, His power has not abated
 33. The world still needs to see the evidences of His love and ability to heal broken lives

III. CONCLUSION

A. *The Pearls*

1. I want to end this morning by reading the story of a littler girl and a string of pearls

Her name was Jennifer, a cheerful five year old with bouncy golden curls. Waiting with her mother at the checkout stand she saw them--a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box.

"Oh, please Mommy, can I have them? Please Mommy--PLEASE!"

Quickly the mother checked out the back of the foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "\$1.95. that's almost \$2. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."

As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her piggy bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbors and asked Mrs. McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and gown up. She wore them everywhere -- Sunday School, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming and had a bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.

Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night, when he had finished reading, he asked her, "Do you love me?"

"Oh yes Daddy--you know I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh Daddy--not my pearls. But you can have Princess, the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember Daddy, the one you gave me--she's my favorite."

"That's okay honey. Daddy loves you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss

About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?"

Oh yes Daddy - you know that I love you."

"Then give me your pearls."

"Oh Daddy--not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."

"That's okay. Sleep well, little one. Daddy loves you." As always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. "What is it Jenny? What's the matter?"

Jenny didn't say a word. She just lifted her hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a quiver, she finally said, "Here Daddy, it's for you."

With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's father reached out with one hand to take the dime-store necklace and with the other hand, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up her dime store stuff so he could give her the genuine treasure.

2. How like our Heavenly Father
3. What are you hanging on to?
4. What worthless bauble do you cling to that keeps you from enjoying the fullness God has for you and wants to give you?