

No “foolishness” allowed (Galatians 3:1–5)

The charge against true believers in Galatia of foolishness and being “bewitched” should shake us out of any lethargic thinking that we would not be in danger of being tricked by false teaching. It was a danger for the Galatian believers, even though possibly surprising to Paul and illogical considering their conversion experience. Before arguing from the Old Testament (vv 6ff) Paul recalls their conversion experience, which itself supported this essential gospel truth: to be declared right before God and not liable to punishment happens only by faith in Christ alone.

1. **The charge:** *foolishness and acting bewitched*

The term “foolish”, which is used here, refers to an attitude of heart and mind, and especially to the neglect of a person who can think who does not make the effort to discern the truth. “Bewitched” is not used here literally, but figuratively of the distraction they demonstrated with things other than the truths which they should have known.

Ignorance due to human laziness is one reason for doctrinal error. This is a cause of error which can be avoided by regular study and application of Scripture to life.

2. **The surprise:** *seemingly forgetting Jesus Christ as crucified*

Paul had preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 2:2) in a manner as clear and pronounced to their eyes as the placards displaying government announcements. The person of Jesus Christ, as Son of God, and His work on the cross made any attempt at justification by works of the law blasphemous. That they seemingly let Christ crucified out of sight was surprising.

“Christ crucified” is an essential part of the gospel. Furthermore, countering “foolishness” and the “enchantments” of certain false teaching begins with looking again at Jesus and His sacrificial death.

3. **The illogic:** *turning to works is illogical when receiving the Spirit and the blessings is by faith*

With four rhetorical questions concerning their experience with the Holy Spirit Paul calls upon the Galatians to consider the illogic of turning to works rather than continuing by faith.

a. *A question how spiritual life started:* “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”

The Spirit was promised to all who believed (*cf.* Acts 2:38–39). Some, but not all, displayed supernatural signs of the Spirit (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 12:29–30), but all true believers experience the Spirit producing His fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). The reception of the Spirit and His working in believers was by faith, not by works of the law.

b. *A question how spiritual life is completed:* “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

It was a failure in clear logic, to know that regeneration required the Spirit received by faith, but to think at the same time that one’s own human efforts could bring that work to completion. Sanctification and glorification, like regeneration, are all accomplished by God and received by faith, not works.

c. *A question of spiritual experience:* “Did you suffer so many things in vain-- if indeed it was in vain?”

The Galatian believers may have suffered tribulation, but certainly had experienced much in their spiritual life. Had they learned nothing from those experiences about living by faith? Paul hopes for better. God intends you to profit spiritually from your experiences, so review them in light of God’s revealed, written truth.

d. *A question of God’s miraculous provision:* “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?”

God liberally supplies His Spirit who works powerfully in and for believers in supernatural and providential ways. God gave the Spirit and His blessings in response to faith, not to works of the law. A Spirit-transformed life should be the experience of every true believer.

The Galatian believers remembering Christ’s sacrificial death and looking at their conversion experience with the Holy Spirit should have seen that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. It should shake them from “foolishness” and prepare them for Paul’s arguments from the Old Testament. Believers today have a similar responsibility. Guard against dangerous “foolishness.”

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- What can “bewitch” believers today and distract them from “Christ crucified”? What might distract you and how can you combat it?
- Why is the death of Christ so central to the gospel message?
- What evidences of the Holy Spirit working do you see in your life? How do they help you understand that the Christian life is by faith and not by works of the law?