

Sherwin-Williams.¹ (slide.1)

We're spending the fall months looking at Paul's letter to the Galatians. In this letter, Paul passionately defends the gospel as that which brings freedom: not only freedom from our sin, but also freedom from our self-justification. In doing so, Paul calls his readers to rest in the love of Father and the presence of the Spirit through the work of the Son who became a curse and paid the price, so we live forever. Kyle read our text, so let's open by looking to the Lord in prayer. (slide/black.2)

Years ago, a little after Angela and I were married, I got a job as an assistant manager at a Sherwin-Williams paint store. I was responsible for bookkeeping and credit collections, but mainly I took care of customers and mixed paint. It's my first day, and a customer comes up to the counter. She orders a gallon of paint. The color she wanted was *Bashful Seahorse* or something like that. The manager training me to a (slide.3) machine full of different color tints. Nowadays, these machines are fully computer automated, but back then you had to mix colors manually. He opened a big book, looked up *Bashful Seahorse*, and there next to the name was the formula (slide.4): 3 parts yellow ochre, 4 parts burnt umber, 6 parts vermilion, 2 parts black. My manager showed me how to put the tints into the base color. We put the can of paint on one of those shaking machines and voilà (slide.5)—*Bashful Seahorse*. After the customer left, my manager explained to me that the order of the tints is of no importance. You can start with the 3 parts of yellow ochre, but you don't have to. You can just as easily start with 4 parts of burnt umber, or 6 parts of vermilion, or 2 parts black. As long as all the tints get in the can, and as long as you shake up gallon, the color will turn out the same (slide/black.6)

While marveling over what I was just told, a second customer stepped up to the counter. He ordered (slide.7) a gallon of primer and a gallon of paint, and I learn something *else* that day. I learn that (slide.8) the primer goes on first and then the paint (okay, I think I knew that). The primer does a good job adhering to the surface; it covers stains. But the finish coat offers protection. The order of color tints in a gallon of may not matter, but if you get the primer and paint out of order, you'll have a mess on your hands as well as the wrong color on the wall (slide/black.9).

So here's the Apostle Paul, and for Apostle Paul the gospel is much more like the application of primer and paint than it is like the mixing of tints. For Paul, the order of the gospel is not just of *some* importance—no, it is of huge/critical importance. So here he is, and some years back he had preached the gospel in the region of Galatia, and (in a nutshell) here's what he told them; he said (slide.10):

"Number one, believe on Jesus (who He is; what He did)."

"Number two, be saved/justified."

"Number three: in response, obey His commands."

"Believe, be saved, obey." But then, after Paul left the region, these churches in Galatia came under the influence of a group of teachers, and these teachers change the order. Basically, here's what they said; they said (slide.11): "Believe on Jesus Christ, obey the law (eat kosher, get circumcised), and then (and only then) you'll be saved. That's very different. Paul was saying that faith and salvation go together, and produce in obedience. These false teachers were saying, "No, faith and obedience go together, and from *that* you get salvation."² As far as Paul was concerned, this was not the same idea in two different typefaces. No, as we see at the start of his letter, for Paul, this was another gospel. *In fact, as far as he was concerned, this was no gospel at all!* (slide/black.12)

Paul's Rebuke.

So, as our (slide.13) chapter opens, Paul is beside himself. Up to now, Paul's language had been forceful, but for the most part, it had not been personal. In the earlier part of the letter, Paul's focus surrounded the story of his call from God, his two trips to Jerusalem, and his altercation with Peter. As Mark shared last week, from there, Paul used the rest of chapter 2 to unfold a careful, reasoned theological argument concerning justification by faith and the folly of self-justification. But here at the top of chapter 3, Paul's language changes. He sputters and spits with fury. And rightly so! These Galatians were in danger of nullifying the grace of God in exchange for something stupid.³

Paul says, *"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"* The language is strong. It seems like translators compete in their efforts to capture the full weight of this rebuke. I think my favorite comes from J. B. Phillips' translation from back in the 1940s. He writes (slide.14), *"O you dear idiots of Galatia...who has been casting a spell over you? Surely you cannot be so idiotic..."*

The word (slide.15) translated in the ESV as "bewitched" means literally (slide.16), "to give an evil eye."⁴ Whether he speaking literally or figuratively, Paul sees the actions of the Galatians as more than a mere oversight, but instead as an error that is genuinely sinister and wicked. This is serious stuff. It's interesting, Paul throws in a play on words. In order to "break the spell" they're under, these Galatians need stop listening to the false teachers and, instead, look to the cross. They need to remember that (slide.17) "it was before their eyes" that Christ was "publicly portrayed"—literally (slide.18) "graphically/vividly" portrayed as crucified.⁵

How can God accept us? Only as we trust in Christ (slide/black.19). This is the biblical doctrine of justification Mark spoke of last week. We cannot be saved by anything we "do." We can only be saved by what Christ did when He died on the cross and rose from the dead. This is the gospel. It's more than a set of rules. No, it's a gift that is freely given to us by God's grace.⁶ John Stott puts it best; he writes (slide.20):

The gospel is not good advice to humanity, but good news about Christ.
It's not an invitation to us to do anything, but a declaration of what God has done.
To add good works to the work of Christ was an offence to His finished work.⁷

(slide/black.21).

An Argument From Their Own Experience.

Paul then launches into three reasons/arguments why these Galatians believers should resist the teachings these people that had been troubling them. And through these arguments, we see something that applies to us. First off, Paul offers the Galatians (slide.22) **an argument from their own experience**. Paul asks a series of rapid-fire questions, all of which he expects them to answer on the basis of their own experience; he asks (slide.23):

- ² Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?
- ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?
- ⁵ So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

I think about my own life, and to be honest I'm pretty sure I never set out to become a Christian. Yet in the spring quarter of my senior year, I found myself spending Sunday mornings and Thursday nights in a (slide.24) chapel on the campus of BGSU singing songs and hearing sermons about a guy named Jesus. God's grace got a hold of me (slide/black.25). And the same is true of each of you who were apprehended by the gospel—both those who spent years living reckless lives apart from God, as well as those who were born into Christian homes, baptized as infants, and knew the words to "Jesus Loves Me" before you knew how to tie your shoes. In either case, God's grace got a hold of you. This was not our own doing but was instead the work of the Lord.

So here's the question Paul is asking (slide.26): "*Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh/human effort?*" Here's the point he's making; he's saying that the way you get in the Christian faith is the exact way you continue the Christian faith. There is no difference. The way you start is the way you proceed. To use theological language, just as our justification relies completely on the gospel, so does our sanctification (our growth in Christ); it too also relies completely on the gospel.

It's not as if we have one way of becoming Christians, but then and another way of growing as Christians.⁸ And yet, that is the mindset of many professing Christians —this thinking that we are saved by the gospel, but then we grow by applying biblical principles to every area of life.⁹ But that's not how it works. I love how Tim Keller puts it; he writes that (slide.27):

We cannot deal with our failures imply by "trying harder." The way to progress as a Christian is to continually repent and uproot these systems in the same way we became Christians, namely by (1st) the vivid depiction (and re-depiction) of Christ's saving work for us (slide.28) and (2nd) abandoning self-trusting efforts to complete ourselves. We must go back again and again to the gospel of Christ crucified, so that our hearts are more deeply gripped by the reality of what He did and who we are in Him.

We are *justified* by faith in Christ, but we are also *sanctified* by faith in Christ (slide/black.29).

An Argument From the Story of Abraham.

So Paul (slide.30) first argues from the Galatian's own experience. He then offers (slide.31) **an argument from the story of Abraham.** Starting at verse 6, Paul writes (slide.32):

⁶ Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

I'm going to be brief on this point, mainly because Abraham's story is covered with greater detail in the section Mark will be covering next week. But let me say a few things (slide/black.33). As Mark and I have been mentioning throughout this series, these troublesome teachers who were agitating the Galatians had come into the region with a message telling them that if the really want to be saved/find favor with God, the need to follow the OT law, in particular the need to be

circumcised. So for that reason, it's probably no accident that Paul uses Abraham as the core of his second argument. After all, Abraham was the first patriarch that was told by God to be circumcised. We read of this in Genesis 17.

At the age of ninety-nine, God appears to Abraham, his name is changed from Abram to Abraham. He also tells Abraham that he, his household, and all of his male servants (300), need to be circumcised. So for these troublesome teachers who were agitating the Galatians with the message of circumcision, Abraham would have been their go-to guy and the center of their argument. But Paul flips the script and says, "No, Abraham is my go-to guy and the center of my argument." He says (slide.34), "Guess what? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned/credited to him as righteousness." The text does not say that Abraham lived a perfectly righteous life and was therefore deemed righteous. Nor does it even say that Abraham's faith was perfectly righteous (Abraham's subsequent actions make clear that even his faith often faltered). No, we're told that his faith was "reconned/counted/credited" as if it was righteous.

In addition, Paul uses the text to underscore that this salvation/righteousness Abraham received was in fact (slide.35) the gospel before the gospel. Does that mean Abraham was aware of the baby that would be born in Bethlehem, turn water into wine, heal the sick, feed 5,000, die on a cross, and rise one the third day? That seems unlikely. But, as we read, some sense of the gospel was preached beforehand, and therefore all who are of faith (both Jew and Gentile alike) are "blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." More about Abraham next week (slide/black.36).

An Argument From the Only Alternatives.

Again, number one (slide.37), Paul argues from the Galatian's own experience. Number two (slide.38), he makes his case from the story of Abraham. Number three (slide.39), Paul offers **an argument from the only alternatives.**

Paul tells these Galatians (and tells us) that there are only two possible ways of being accepted as righteous by God (slide.40). One way is by doing; the other is by believing. One way is to (slide.41) "live by" the law, to keep it perfectly. That's what we read here in verse 12. Keller writes that to "live by" something means to rely on it for our happiness and fulfillment. Whatever we "live by" is essentially the bottom line of our lives—whatever gives us meaning, confidence, and definition. For these Galatians, it was the attempt to "live by" the law. For most people (even for those of us who profess faith in Christ) it's often something else—some kind of "functional savior" that makes us feel okay about ourselves. It can be almost anything: money, prestige, attention, achievement, comfort, approval. However, as we see throughout Scripture

(especially in Paul's letter to the Romans), those who try to do this will inevitably fail and will then be subject to the "curse" mentioned (slide.42) in verse 10 (Deut 27:26). The other way to be accepted by God to (slide.43) "live by faith" (Hab 2:4). To trust God and to rest on Him for our salvation. This second alternative brings us back to Jesus from verse 1. Paul reminds his reader (including us) that Christ has done for us on the cross what we could not do for ourselves. The only way to escape the "curse" is not by our work, but by His.¹⁰ This Jesus who (slide.44) redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, so that in Christ the blessing of Abraham might come *even to Gentiles*, so that we—you and I, people in Galatian, and all sorts of people—might receive the promised Spirit through faith (slide/black.45).

The grace that saves us.

The grace that preserves us.

The grace that makes us human.

The grace that brings us together.

The grace that animates our hearts to love one another.

To God's glory, now and forever.

Let's pray.

¹ OT reading: Ps 96:1-6 (ESV).

² Timothy Keller, "The Law and the Promise" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1998).

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2005), 81.

⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAB (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 207.

⁵ Ryken, *Galatians*, REC, 83; Timothy Keller, *Paul's Letter to the Galatians: Leader's Guide* (New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2010), 64.

⁶ Ryken, *Galatians*, REC, 80.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 70.

⁸ Timothy Keller, "Relying on the Law" (sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 1998).

⁹ Dick Kaufmann quoted in, *Paul's Letter to the Galatians: Leader's Guide*, 65.

¹⁰ Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 78-79; Samuel Ngewa, "Galatians," *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 1446; Keller, *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 69.