

# America's Hope Monthly

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## “Oh Foolish Galatians”

By C.O. Stadsklev

*“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?”*

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

*“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” —Galatians 3:1-3*

Are we foolish? Are we in danger today of being bewitched? These questions are especially timely and important for people who know and study the national message of the Bible, as well as the message of personal salvation.

To begin this study, let us note from II Peter 3:15,16 what the Apostle Peter wrote about Apostle Paul. He writes, “. . . our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood . . .” So we need not think it strange if we have difficulty understanding the writings of the Apostle Paul— Peter, too, found some of them difficult.

This is very interesting in view of the first controversy that arose among the early believers, as recorded in Acts 15. In this context we find that Paul and Barnabas had been witnessing and reporting to the believers as to God’s blessing and working through them.

Then verse 5 states, “But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”

Apparently one of the difficulties at that time (and one that has existed down through the church age) is the matter of law and grace. Where does one leave off and the other begin? What should our position be as individual believers in regard to the law of God?

We must be very careful not to confuse law and grace and thus destroy living, productive faith. Perhaps no people need to have this clarified and set forth more than Kingdom people who know the national message and the laws of God for the nation.

Recall that in the 15th chapter of Acts the church had just been launched, the apostles had been out ministering, and they had now assembled to report. And we read that there was a sect of the Pharisees who believed the gospel and were identified with the Christians, but they taught that it was needful for the believers to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses.

The chapter continues from verse 6, “And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.” Peter is testifying and reporting.

“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” This is quite interesting, is it not?

To get the full impact and teaching of this Scripture, one must place himself back in the days of the early church. Peter has already indicated his position in regard to the Christian and the law of Moses by saying God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

He goes on, “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (In other words, a grievous yoke and burden would be placed upon the Christian believers if the apostles were to demand as this sect of Pharisees did, that they must keep the law of Moses.) “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

“Then all the multitude kept silence and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”

This was really food for thought — it was something to think over, a very serious matter in the early church. Their position had to be taken according to the Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Then James got up, quoted Scripture and set forth some



prophecy; but in verse 19 he came to the issue of the law of Moses and the individual Christian:

"Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God (He agreed and took a stand with the Apostle Peter.): But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." James suggested just four things that they advise these young Christians (new converts) to abstain from. We will find the reason for these a little later.

"For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren . . ."

Note the development here. First Peter gave his opinion; then the whole body of the apostles and the leaders of this new faith agreed that they should write letters, sending a report and instruction to the Christians who were troubled.

"And they wrote letters by them after this manner . . . Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well."

These four things characterized the heathen people, their religion and their lives; thus abstaining from them set the Christians apart from the worship, the ritual, and the lives of the heathen people. When a heathen became a Christian, he was instructed by the apostles to refrain from these things — not to merit favor from God by keeping the law, but to separate himself from the heathen religion and to identify himself with the Christian faith.

"So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation."

So beginning with Peter, James and Paul, next the whole body of the apostles, and then the people who received this instruction — they all testified, witnessed and agreed that this was the proper position for an individual Christian believer to take.

This matter of the law and the grace of God is something that the Apostle Paul had to contend with and make plain to the people. This was his calling and commission from God. In Romans 14:4-6 we read concerning Paul's position on the

Sabbath, the keeping of one particular day. This issue has not been settled yet since a great host of people will not accept what he wrote.

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

"He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks."

We read something similar in First Corinthians 8:8 concerning meat sacrificed to idols. Paul wrote, "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse."

This has reference to one's spiritual relationship to God. The Apostle Paul is not canceling out God's law in regard to clean and unclean food. He is talking about our spiritual life, our fellowship with the Lord, and plainly states it is not based upon any observance of the law.

This is not solely a New Testament doctrine — it is actually an Old Scriptural doctrine because no one was justified by law in the Old Scripture. If people had been justified by law, there would have been no need for blood sacrifice or for the tabernacle.

There would have been no need for millions of animals to be sacrificed. The difficulty in this realm arises when people fail to distinguish between the national and personal messages of the Scripture.

The tendency to get under law and merit God's favor by what we do or do not do is something Christians must constantly guard against. It is as natural as can be for us to slip into this position and the instant we do, we move away from the grace of God and living faith.

Paul continues in First Corinthians 8:9,

"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge (sees you as a Christian) sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?"

What Paul is teaching from these passages in Romans, Corinthians and Acts is that as individual Christian believers there is no merit, righteousness nor reward for us in keeping the law so far as our spiritual relationship with God is concerned. He does make it plain, however, that if we honor and live by the statutes, judgments and commandments, we will be blessed in our bodies — we will have better health, etc.

Let us now turn to the second chapter of Galatians, beginning with verse 11. Incidentally, the entire book of Galatians was written with one thing in mind—to keep Christian people straight on the matter of law and grace.



"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed."

We can thank God that the Apostle Paul had enough grace to correct Peter and that Peter had grace to accept the correction. Peter had done the very thing we have been writing about and that Christians are constantly inclined to do either consciously or subconsciously. Paul rebuked him openly.

"For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." Do you follow what happened?

Peter was afraid of the sect of Pharisees that taught it is all right to believe in Christ, but one is still under the law for personal salvation. It is true that the nation is under the law, but we are concerned here with our personal relationship to God and the grace of God.

"And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"

They were not consistent. They had one standard for the Gentile and another for the Jew for personal salvation. And Peter (because of this teaching and the agitation by these people) made a little compromise. He withdrew from the Gentiles and refrained from eating with them, turning for fellowship to the Jews.

The Apostle Paul is not teaching something contrary to the Old Scripture on the separation of the races. He is merely setting forth the basis for personal salvation for both Jew and Gentile. The basis is not the law—it never has been and never can be.

In Galatians 3:28 Paul makes this very plain by saying, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

So far as personal salvation is concerned, it is the same for everybody. Personal salvation is not based upon a little grace and then a little law — it is all grace. It is grace not only when we are saved — it is grace until we draw our last breath.

Galatians 2:16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Note the repetition in this one verse — justification is not by the law neither to obtain salvation nor after we are saved.

Verse 21: "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."

This brings us to our text in Galatians 3:1: "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?

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

A very good question! Did you receive the assurance and the witness of the Holy Spirit by the works of the law? No one ever has, although many have tried.

How does one receive the Spirit? The answer is, "I believed and then I had the witness. I received the Holy Spirit apart from the law."

Paul asks another question in verse 3: "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

All of us are inclined in this direction. We accept salvation through faith; we believe, rejoice and receive the witness of the Spirit; we experience the grace of God. Then, if we are not careful, we slip away from the grace of God into works. This is especially serious among Kingdom people because we emphasize the national laws of God. Moses made it very plain that our national righteousness is based on observance of the laws, statutes, judgments and commandments, but our personal righteousness is not based on this observance.

"Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit (he who has the anointing, leading and enabling of the Holy Spirit), and worketh miracles among you (he who has had answers to prayer and experienced the working of God), doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The answer is certainly "by the hearing of faith."

"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham: 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. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham:

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. "Recall we read Peter's words in Acts that neither we nor our fathers gained righteousness through the law. What sense was there, then, in expecting heathen people to gain personal righteousness and salvation through the law?

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." This is a quotation from the Old Scripture. It is not a new doctrine but goes way back to Adam, Eve and Abel.

"And the law is not of faith (a very significant statement by the Apostle Paul in regard to the law): but, The man that doeth them shall live in them (or by them, as we read elsewhere)." Physical, financial and material blessings come through keeping the law, but not personal salvation, answers to prayer or the anointing and moving of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 21 states, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid (there is no conflict here): for if there had been a law given which could have given life (which could



have imparted eternal life), verily righteousness should have been by the law." Faith in the promise of God brings about the new birth; faith in the promises of God brings answers to prayer; faith in the promises of God brings the enabling of the Holy Spirit. "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

Galatians chapter 4 beginning with verse 19: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you . . ." Here Paul indicates his concern, anxiety and distress because he knows that the blessing and the moving of the Spirit of God will leave this body of believers if they get into the realm of righteousness by law.

"I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman." Paul goes on to use this as an illustration or an allegory and admonishes in verse 30, Cast out the bondwoman . . ." In other words, cast out the notion that there is personal salvation through the law.

He continues in chapter 5, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law."

Circumcision is used here to represent the keeping of the law. I must emphasize and repeat that Paul was not referring to the physical, material, temporal blessings that come to those who honor God's laws of hygiene and food, for example. Rather, he is dealing with our righteousness as a Christian and the basis of our approach to God for answers to prayer. As believers, we have no more righteousness of our own today then we had the day we were saved.

The teaching of the Scripture is that the "old man" is

crucified and put away; and certainly there is nothing good to come from something that has been crucified and buried. It is one thing to be saved, basing salvation on the righteousness of Christ, and it is another thing to live a life with that faith and understanding, believing God's promises.

"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." Such a one does not lose his personal salvation and become "unsaved," but has gotten away from the grace, favor, intervention and mercy of God. "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." This is true our entire life — to the very end. Some people quickly conclude, then, that grace is a license to sin. On, no. In Romans 8:1, 3 and 4 we read:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus . . . For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

There is nothing wrong with the law; the trouble is with the flesh, our carnal mind. In Romans 7:14 Paul says "the law is spiritual," but adds in the very next statement, "But I am carnal." So as Christian people, we conform to the will and the Word of God because of the spirit and the grace of God. We do not have the spirit and the grace of God because we conform to the law. As Paul put it, ". . . that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Let us conclude with the following words of the Apostle Paul from Galatians 6:14 and 15: ". . . God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

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