

Part 5: The Gospel For Dummies

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When the DOS operating system was released in the 80's, it promised endless possibilities. The problem was—users struggled to figure out how to use this powerful new tool. But in 1991, a tech writer by the name of Dan Gookin wrote a book that would change things forever. The book was titled, "DOS for Dummies."

Those of us old enough to remember bookstores remember the boom that followed. The "For Dummies" series gained popularity for simplifying the complex. Today, you can find "Cryptocurrency for Dummies," "Neuroscience for Dummies," and even more obscure interests like "Knitting for Dummies," and "UFOs for Dummies." For Dummies has sold more books than top pop-culture favorites like "Twilight" and "The Hunger Games" combined.

Turns out, there's a market for dummies. That's why the title of our sermon today is, "The Gospel for Dummies."

Paul has reached a breaking point in his letter to the Galatian Christians. Having defended his apostolic background and the raw truth of the gospel, he addresses his audience: "O Foolish, Galatians." Which is an apostolic way of saying, "Hey dummy, I'm talking to you."

Last week Paul addressed the core issue in the Gentile church with a simple truth: "A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Given what the Galatian churches were struggling with—problems of real weight—this was the equivalent of Paul asking the tech support question: "Have you tried turning it on and off again?"

And that's a question that makes liars of all of us! We always say yes because the solution is never that simple. We did the basics, we believed in Jesus, but now we've got real problems. So dear Paul, if you could please skip ahead to where we are in knowledge and life—that would be great.

All too quickly our own lives represent this dynamic. We turn to faith in Jesus and trust it to save us eternally, to immediately remove the condemnation our sins earned, to secure for us fellowship with the Triune God who is blessed for all eternity, and to promise us life unending in glory with him—but how can the gospel help our real problems? Enough about that Paul—what have you got for parenting, for conflicts, for doubt, persecution, and AI? Maybe that's how you feel when you hear us talk about believing the gospel. We know it!

But Paul's main point today isn't just to know the gospel—it's to believe it. That's our main point: **Believe the gospel.** Paul says, "You might claim to know it—but have you tried to believe it?"

Paul is going to walk us Dummies through the process of believing and applying the gospel. And he's going to give us three simple reminders of how we live out the simple gospel's supernatural power: **Keep Seeing Jesus, Keep Walking in the Spirit, and Keep Believing the Promise of God.**

Let's begin with our opening verse: **Galatians 3:1**, O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

Here is our first point this morning: **Keep Seeing Jesus.**

Paul is toying with the Galatians a little here. He says, "Who has bewitched you?"

Maybe that word makes you think of the song, "I'll put a spell on you," and that's what it means! It's a word used in Greek to describe a superstitious belief of those who had what they called, "an evil eye." Some pagan spiritualists would try and convince others that they had the capacity to hex you, dull your senses, and cause physical damage to you just by looking at you.

If you think that's outlandish—you're not alone. That's Paul's very point. Remember, these Christians are scared to even eat with Gentiles for fear of catching damnation. They certainly wouldn't buy into such outlandish ideas of pagan witchcraft.

Paul leverages that and says, "Well, if it's not a fairy tale curse—then how did you stop believing the gospel you so clearly saw? Was it not before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?"

When we hear "portrayed" we might think of something deceitful. A lie portrayed as a truth. But the word actually means "publicly posted," like a placard placed upon a building for clear identification.

He's assuming it was clearly seen—but Paul is drawing our attention to how they saw it. These Galatian Christians live far from Jerusalem. It's not likely by distance or by time that they saw the events in Jerusalem.

But notice the clarity of language he used—and assumes they would agree. You saw him with your own eyes, publicly with others, clearly crucified for your sins. Paul's language emphasizes the HD clarity of what they saw—but how did they see it?

Paul already reminded them: **Galatians 1:9**, "As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed."

The clearest we will ever see Jesus is by faith. You might think belief would be easier if you were there, but what a gift we have in the eyes of faith! Most of the people who were in Jerusalem saw it and didn't know what to make of it. Even those who witnessed the resurrection Jesus were met with confusion until Jesus helped them make clear sense of it.

And how did he do that? By using the scriptures to show the truth meaning behind the true history. Jesus didn't just die—he died for your sins. Which means if we are to see the gospel properly—we must see the cross personally. That doesn't mean we see the cross with our own eyes—but that we see the cross for our own sins.

Our own eyes can see clearly, but never completely. That's why we take pictures. It allows us the time to pick up the details. But the eyes of faith are given the clarity and definition of doctrine. This is what the Bible does for us. It presents to the eye of faith Jesus in full detail. John Stott said it well when he said

this: "The Bible will give Christ to you...in an intimacy so close that he would be less visible to you if he stood before your eyes."

If I told you to close your eyes and then to tell me about your crush, you'd probably paint a pretty clear picture. But if I told you to tell me about the clear beauty of Jesus in the gospel would you be able to describe it? It doesn't have to be complicated. It doesn't need to have all the details. But it's got to have the detail of the cross at the center.

And if we see Jesus on that cross for our sins—we won't forget it. It's why we have sung for hundreds of years: "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved; how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed."

If Jesus is clear, but the cross isn't—I don't know what you see—but it's not the Jesus of the Bible. If you see Jesus—but he's not of any importance to you—then your eyes aren't working. But Paul says to us and to the Galatians, "If you see him, believe him. Do you know how you were saved? By faith in the cross of Jesus. Believe it. Believe the cross matters."

For the world seeing means believing. But for the Christian it is belief that gives us sight not just on the moment we were saved, but on everything that happens after it. The gospel gives us life—and the gospel guides our life.

This leads us to our next point: **Keep Walking in the Spirit.**

Paul now connects the completed work of Jesus to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. This is the first time the Spirit shows up in this letter, and he will be a central character for the next couple chapters.

Paul's next question is just as simple: "Do you know how you received the Holy Spirit?" **Galatians 3:2**, "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?"

Have you ever been asked a question that you're uncertain of the answer--and yet you have a pretty clear idea of what answer you're supposed to give? As we sit here today, we can all guess the answer Paul would want us to give. When did the Galatians receive the Holy Spirit?

Paul's not giving the Galatians a theology quiz. Paul's asking them about their own experience. Luke shows us the answer in Acts 13 when after Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel we read: **Acts 13:48,52**, "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed...And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."

When they believed—they had the Holy Spirit. "You received the Holy Spirit when you believed?" asks Paul, "Then believe it."

What does this change? Well, remember the point of tension in the Galatian community was, "Who belongs to God?" The Judaizers were saying that one only belonged to God, and therefore to God's people if they believed in Jesus—and if they adopted the Jewish practices of the law and circumcision.

No obedience to the law—no belonging. But Paul's logic is just as amazing as the point he's making. He changes the subject and doesn't ask how we belong to God—but how God belongs to us!

They received the Holy Spirit not by works of the law but by faith. They didn't take it, earn it, or achieve it. But the Spirit was theirs. Scandalous isn't it! The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is given as a gift not to those who accept circumcision, or those who try hard to follow Jesus—but to all who believe in him.

How scandalous and how true that we as Christians get to possess the God who possess the whole world?! Isn't that wild to think about? You don't get wetter than wet and you don't get nearer to God than God in you.

When does God send us the Holy Spirit, when we believe in Jesus. Through the Father and the Son, we receive the Spirit and life of God himself. Why does God send the Spirit? Well, there are many reasons, but Paul emphasizes two in particular.

Paul's questions attempt to trap us inside an answer that would appear obvious given his language—but one which his tone indicates we might often struggle to believe. **Galatians 3:3**, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

Why does God give us the Spirit: As a seal of Jesus' perfect work, and a promise to perfect us by Jesus' work.

Paul says it this way in **Ephesians 1:13-14**, "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

There are two kinds of people this world. The first is the kind who hears a friend is coming over shortly and says, "Awesome, looking forward to it." The second is the one who hears that and says, "I've got a lot to clean up before then."

For the Christian, we know there's stuff in our life that's going to change. We aren't yet the person who God would make us to be. But God himself doesn't need you to clean up your house on your own. He's already there. The Spirit reminds us that Jesus' blood washes us clean. And whatever work is left to do—God himself is there to help us get it done.

In fact, he's the one who's going to perfect us in the process. Whatever growth we have in holiness, whatever outward changes in righteousness—it's not going to come from our own work. Our work couldn't clean our hearts—our work won't perfect our hearts.

But the Spirit's work in us is the sign of one and the promise of the other. Jesus doesn't die for you sins and cross his fingers hoping you'll close the deal.

The gospel wasn't begun by God without us only to be completed by us without him.

If you look at an Apple product you'll notice three words: "Designed in California." That's a weird thing to say. It doesn't say "Made in California," or even "Made in the USA." It says "Designed in California." Why? Because it's made China. Apple started the design, set it up for success—but outsourced it to someone else, somewhere else, in order to bring it to completion.

The gospel is not just designed by God, the gospel is start to finish the work of God. He doesn't need you as a sub-contractor! That doesn't mean we don't do things. Paul is going to tell us more about that in chapter 5. But it does mean that whatever is left to do, is left to do in the Spirit not in the flesh.

Alec Motyer captured this self-willed living so well when he talked about how the prophet Isaiah described idolatry. He says, "Isaiah's definition of a 'no-god' is self-reliance. The idolater had 'done it all himself' with his strong hands and skilled fingers. So have you never met someone whose commitment to Christian works has become a pathological zeal? They just can't stop. Devotion has become the hard taskmaster called Duty and, though they would sternly deny it, the onlooker wonders if somewhere along the line justification by faith with its glorious restfulness has been swallowed by salvation by works. Dutifulness has killed off joyfulness."

When we forget to believe the gospel our issues in life become insurmountable. Why? Because we feel we're left alone to solve them. When we forget to believe the gospel we become idolatrous with our success and therefore enslaved to our labors. Why? Because we think we were able to establish ourselves, and therefore it's up to us to make sure no one else can ruin it.

But the one who believes the gospel is both humble and hopeful, weak, yet strong, in process and yet finally made new. And this makes obedience and Christian living a joyful act of communion with God instead of series of panicked and slightly annoyed offerings.

Brothers and sisters, I don't know about you. But being made perfect sounds perfect. I know we all have a different understanding of what perfect might be for each individual--but last time I checked, perfect meant perfect. No lack. No insufficiencies. No flaws. No woes. Perfect.

Now, let's run up the dummy test again. If faith in the cross of Christ is enough to save us from our sins and win us the presence of the Holy Spirit, and if the Holy Spirit being the very presence and power of God is laboring inside of us and for us to present us perfect at the end of it all in him, then why do we spend so little labor in the Spirit and so much labor seeking perfection in everything else. Unless, of course, it is because we don't believe it.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, "I must never ask myself in the first instance; What do I feel about this? The first question is, Do I believe it?" Behind your desire to eat that extra handful of chips is a bewitching belief: "If I eat this, I'll feel content. I worked hard enough. I deserve a break. Without this handful, I might not feel perfect."

Behind your frustration is the belief, "If only people listened to me. If only others respected my opinion. Then everything would work out, it would be perfect." Behind your refusal to bring your sins to God is the belief, "I can deal with this on my own, I've got it under control I just need to try harder, next time, next time, I'll be perfect."

But to summarize Lloyd-Jones, "Most of our unhappiness in life is because we listen to ourselves instead of talking to ourselves."

This is the tension of living in this present evil age, as Paul reminded us in chapter one. This world offers us perfection by the sweat of your brow and it does so in every shape, color and shade. And we've begun that process of finding our perfection in these things countless times. What do they lack? The ability to see it through. But here God promises to see it through and the only reason you have the Holy

Spirit is because he already has. The cross is behind us—only glory remains ahead of us. If you believe Jesus saved you—then you must believe the Holy Spirit labors presently inside of you reminding you of all that is in Christ, all that is now with him in you, and all that is promised in that perfect glory of eternity. Have you tried believing it?

Because you're going to need to. Remember these Galatians who now question Christ—once suffered for Christ! They were at one point physically persecuted because they believed faith in Christ sufficient to save which is why Paul now says this: **Galatians 3:4**, "Did you suffer so many things in vain--if indeed it was in vain."

You will suffer for Christ. For some, it might be persecution. For others, it might be saying no to lust, leaving a party early, or using your vacation fund to help support a missionary. But Paul's point is clear here—if you are willing to suffer for Christ, then you might as well believe in him.

If Christ is worth suffering for—then Christ is worth believing in. If faith in Jesus isn't enough to sustain you through this life then why suffer for him in this life? The answer, again condescendingly assumed by Paul is clear. Because it's not in vain. Faith in Jesus is the very power and promise of God.

This is our last point this morning: **Keep Believing the Power and Promise of God.**

Galatians 3:5-6, "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— just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?"

Notice how Faith, and applying the gospel, is an entirely Trinitarian work. The Son dies to save us by faith. By faith the Spirit works in us drawing us to say no to sin and yes to the gospel. And it is by faith which the Father provides to us in times of difficulty and hardship everything we need.

God the Father is no stingy Father. He doesn't just give us Jesus for utility sake—he gives us Christ out of his love for us. He doesn't just supply us with the Spirit as a means of grace and power—but he himself works through the Christian with power. The Gospel begins and ends in the heart of the Father.

The Puritan, Timothy Rogers once said, “Faith is the mother of all graces.” This is true because what Paul shows us here is that God always does his best work, “by faith.” Paul draws our attention to God's power and miracles at work by faith.

We don't know the Galatians would have taken this. Did God do some miracles among them in the midst of persecution? Did they see the miracle as the power of faith amidst it? Whatever it was—they knew it was a miracle. And Paul wants them to see that miracle was the power of God.

But was God's power displayed to the watching world, and to the comfort of the Christian out of the Christian's ability to keep the law? No. God worked his power through the faith of people who on their own have no power. Why? Because that's how God does his best work. Through faith.

How will God work a miracle of bringing peace into broken homes? Through faithful believers trusting Jesus and walking in the power of the Spirit. How will God grow his church and reach the nations? Through faithful believers trusting Jesus and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why do we not need to adopt the power structures, ploys and strategies of man? Because we have a power greater than that. This is how God has always worked, even back with Abraham. Here, Paul is masterful once more.

The Jews would have thought the exact opposite. They would have thought Paul to say, "Just as Abraham was circumcised and it was counted to him as righteousness." But he says, "No! Abraham believed. Not even Abraham was justified by his works. Not even Abraham was saved by his own flesh. Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness.

God does his best work by faith. The life of a Christian is a life where come what may--we believe the gospel really works. Applying the gospel is a life of desperate living on the hand of an ever-generous God!

Do you believe the gospel? Because if you do—and if that's still not enough—then you're saying this Triune, saving and sustaining God is not enough. But if the gospel is the power of God to save us, to sustain us and to one day raise us up into eternal glory—then we'd be dumb to not believe it's helpful to us today.

The gospel for dummies is a salvation by faith alone in Jesus. Believe it. The gospel for dummies is a faith that labors in the power of the Spirit towards a perfect end in all things. Believe it. The gospel is the power of God in this broken world—and the promise of a powerful deliverance and hope into the next. Believe it.