

“O Foolish Galatians!”

“Oh foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified?” (Galatians 3:1). In the first chapter Paul marveled at the fickleness of the Galatians in their turning away from the gospel which had been delivered to them. In this verse he expresses his conviction they had been bewitched in what they had done since such behavior was senseless, foolish.

In the last chapter Paul had shown that through the law we became dead to the law, that because Christ was crucified for us, we are crucified with him and that if it were possible to be justified by the law, Christ died a needless death! All these three items were so clear, so certain that one would surely have to be bewitched to act otherwise and their actions were foolish. Rather than being justified, they were in danger of falling from grace, salvation (Gal. 5:4). When he adds, *“Before whose eyes Christ was openly set forth crucified,”* Paul reminds them that the death of Jesus, along with the purpose for it, was so vividly set forth before them, it was as though they had themselves witnessed his crucifixion! *“This only would I learn of you. Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* (Gal. 3:12). These Galatians had received the Spirit; they had had the remission of sins and had entered into all the blessings the Spirit promises and gives; they could scarcely deny this for to do so would deny their salvation. Thus, if they acknowledged they had received the Spirit, then what rhyme or reason was there to turning away from that which they knew they had? They could not deny that what they had come from the hearing of faith -- the hearing of the faith, the gospel. It had not come from the works of the law. He continued to press his point. *“Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are ye perfected in the flesh? Did ye suffer so many things in vain? If it indeed be in vain”* (Gal. 3:3f). They knew that Christ’s kingdom as spiritual; that their new birth was spiritual; that through their obedience to the gospel they had begun spiritually *“sons of Abraham”* (Jn. 18:36; 3:3,5; Gal. 3:7). Were they to be perfected in the flesh? His allusion to *“suffer so many things in vain”* is an evident reference to the persecutions which Jews had made unto the disciples in Christ in their own region. Paul had been stoned there, dragged from the city and left for dead by those who insisted on keeping the very things these Galatians were now being beguiled to do! And, if those things had merit; any worth to effect for them justification, then all the suffering they had endured from the persecutions imposed upon them by their Jewish antagonists, was needless. Paul’s statement, *“If it indeed be in vain,”* was spoken to call them to remembrance that these things they suffered were not needless ... they were needful because they

suffered for His sake who, by the death he suffered, could alone provide justification and redemption for them.

Thus Paul asks, "*He that supplieth to you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you,*" can only be a reference to Paul himself (Gal. 3:5). In Luke's history of Paul's preaching in the region which was very likely the area Paul addressed here as Galatia, Paul worked many miracles, one of which was the healing of a lame man in Lystra (Acs 14:8-17). It was an astonishing miracle! They could not deny its authenticity. And how was Paul able to do it, "*By the works of the law or the hearing of faith?*" (Gal. 3:5). They knew it was by the hearing of faith! And, Paul, being an apostle, thus having power to impart spiritual gifts to them, had done so: "*supplieth the Spirit to you the Spirit.*" How had Paul imparted to them the spiritual gifts they possessed, by the hearing of faith or the works of the law? Again, they knew! And, if they had spiritual gifts themselves (and they did) to whom did they owe the receptions of their gifts, from Judaizing teaches or the apostle who introduced them to the gospel? To depart from what they had, with the full knowledge that what they had received came through their obedience to the gospel, provoked Paul to ask, "*O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you ...?*"
NEXT: True Children Of Abraham.

Jim McDonald