

# “Finish the Way You Began”

*Galatians 3:1-14*

Jean Francois Gravelet was one of the world's most famous funambulists. A funambulist is a tight rope walker and Gravelet was better known by his stage name 'The Great Blondin'. He is most noted for crossing the American side of Niagara Gorge to the Canadian side (and back) over 300 times in his lifetime. On one occasion he asked the crowd if they believed he could cross the rope, and they all shouted 'yes'. But then he asked them 'Who's willing to climb on my back?' the crowd grew silent. But his manager Harry Colcord said he would. When he got onto Blondin's back, Blondin said

*"Look up, Harry.... you are no longer Colcord, you are Blondin. Until I clear this place be a part of me, mind, body, and soul. If I sway, sway with me. Do not attempt to do any balancing yourself. If you do we will both go to our death."*

Needless to say Harry Colcord trusted Blondin to get him safely across and made no attempt to balance or add anything to get him safe across the other side. To have done that would have been utterly foolish.

This is what the apostle Paul said to the Galatians who, heard and accepted the gospel of faith in Jesus Christ when Paul and Barnabas travelled through the region in Acts 13-14, but some of whom had been persuaded by Jewish legalists that, no if Gentiles want to get right with God they have to follow the Jewish laws on top of faith in Jesus. So here in Gal. 3:1 a frustrated Paul states,

*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.<sup>2</sup> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?<sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

So Paul says it is foolish to go back to works when you've been saved by faith. He's defended his apostleship and the gospel itself so far, now he uses logic, Scripture and the Galatians own personal experience to again show that faith in Jesus Christ plus works is not the gospel. So he begins logically looking at their own experience in vv.1-5,

## **Since We're Saved by Grace, We're Not Sanctified by Performance** **(3:1-5)**

He asks the Galatian believers a number of questions to make them think about how they were saved and how their lives changed because of Jesus Christ. To go backwards and try to add to your faith through works is foolish. The word 'fool' means one has no sense. So Paul says

### ***To earn God's favour makes no sense (v.1)***

It's so foolish Paul says it's demonic. 'Who has bewitched you' Paul asks. Bewitched means to have a spell cast over them. I don't think Paul means this happened but what he's intimating is that to go backwards from faith in Jesus to trying to earn God's favour through good works is as if someone has cast a spell over you. To accentuate that he adds, 'before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly

*portrayed as crucified.* ' "Publicly portrayed" means a public announcement like a billboard or government document has been made. It's a s if you were walking up to the movie theatre and a giant 20' poster says 'Now playing The Lion King' but you keep convincing yourself that you're going to watch Star Wars! It's ludicrous! What's wrong with you? Don't you see what's obvious in front of your face?

Paul now asks some questions; questions that by the way it is asked makes the answer obvious. In v.2 he asks,

*<sup>2</sup> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*

Obvious answer; we received the Spirit from God when we believed, by grace through faith.

### ***The Holy Spirit is given not earned (vv.2-3)***

When we place our trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation, He sends His Spirit in us to seal us for Himself. The Spirit is given at salvation by grace through faith.

*Eph. 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

*<sup>2</sup> Cor. 1:21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

Paul says look at how you've grown spiritually. 'Attain your goal', literally means being perfected. Are the changes in your character something you did or the Holy Spirit did in you? The gospel is not positive thinking or be better. The gospel is the good news that Jesus loves you and wants to change you to be like Him through faith alone and a continual crucifying of our desires for His (2:20). The life we now live by faith shows through the fruit of the Spirit. The spiritual fruit of the Holy Spirit is the external evidence of joy, love, peace, patience, kindness because we're allowing the Spirit to work in our hearts as we read and obey the Word. Ever tried to be more patient? Ever tried on your own 'I'm going to be more joyful today'? Didn't go to well did it? But look back on your life. Have you grown to be more patient, more joyful, kinder, more self-controlled since you accepted Christ? How did that happen? You've been growing in the Lord more, living by faith believing that He's sovereignly in control of your life when it seems out of control. You've trusted God to provide for your needs when you didn't know when or where or how He was going to do it. But He did. You can't make yourself more Christ like but you can trust God more and see Him change you. The goal He has for you is total Christlikeness. Now, turn to the person beside you and say 'You sure have a long way to go, but you've come a long way from where you were.'

Paul moves from the Spirit's work in the Galatians' lives personally to the work the Spirit did publicly.

*<sup>4</sup> Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? <sup>5</sup> Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?*

Paul and Barnabas ministered to the Galatians in Acts 13-14. In Acts 14 we read,

*14:1 At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. <sup>2</sup> But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. <sup>3</sup> So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders. ...*

*<sup>8</sup> In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. <sup>9</sup> He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed <sup>10</sup> and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.*

Iconium and Lystra are in the province of Galatia. Paul said they performed signs and wonders there, especially the healing of the lame man at Lystra. Did God do this because Paul and Barnabas were such good law keepers or because Paul and Barnabas had faith in God to do miracles by the Spirit's power? And when you read Acts 13-14 Paul's preaching of the gospel aroused opposition and attacks on Paul and Barnabas and it would seem from Gal. 3 here that many believers in Galatia suffered because of the gospel. Was your suffering in vain that you have to go back to law keeping? Suffering affirms your faith. Law keepers weren't persecuted. But people who have faith in Jesus suffer. Suffering for Jesus is never in vain.

So an exasperated and frustrated Paul appeals to the Galatian believers - some of whom had fallen for the Jewish legalists' pressure that unless one is circumcised, and observes the Sabbath and eats certain foods only then are you truly a child of God – that works can't save you only faith in Jesus can. But as if he's anticipating an argument from the Jews themselves who were saying 'That's not the way God did it before, why has He changed now?' Paul says 'Okay, let's look back at the Old Testament. Guess what?

## **This is Not New; Faith Has Always Been God's Way** **(3:6-9)**

The Judaizers were big on Moses of course but Paul says let's go back before Moses. Let's talk about Abraham. Yet in talking about Abraham Paul actually presents two proofs that faith in God was always the way to please God, not works of the law. First Abraham is

### ***Historical proof (vv.6-7)***

*<sup>6</sup> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.*

Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 when Abraham was worried about how God was going to fulfil the promises He made to Abraham in Gen. 12:2-3, he asked God are you going to use my servant Eliezer? God replied to Abraham 'This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' Then God said to Abraham, look up to heaven and count the stars; if you can. So shall your descendants be. And that's when Abraham believed God and declared Abraham righteous, because he believed by faith alone (since it was a physical impossibility) that God in His grace alone was going to enable Abraham and Sarah to have a son through whom the promises of God would be fulfilled.

So anyone who has faith like Abraham is a child of Abraham. You might be a physical son of Abraham (Jewish) but that doesn't mean you're a spiritual child of Abraham, a believer. This happened long before Moses received the law; at least 450 years before. 'Yes, but it was Abraham with whom God said you had to be circumcised. What about that?' Well, that didn't happen til years later in Gen. 17. Faith came before circumcision. It's always been that way.

And not only was this historical proof but right there in Gen. 12:3 we also have

### ***Prophetic proof (vv.8-9; Gen. 12:3)***

Because when God first made promises to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 He said:

*"Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.<sup>2</sup> I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

God would bless Abraham by making a great nation from him, giving them the land of Canaan and blessing the world through him. How could the world be blessed through Abraham? Through a seed from Abraham who would one day die on the cross for the sins of the world. Notice God said 'all peoples of the earth' here, meaning Gentiles. Meaning, the Galatian believers. Anyone (Jew or Gentile) who has the same faith as Abraham (believe in God's Word even though you can't see the promises fulfilled yet) will be declared righteous by God. Not by works. This is where Paul goes next in Gal. 3:8-9,

*<sup>8</sup> The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."<sup>9</sup> So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

We are saved by faith, not by works. It's always been that way. So, why go back to trying to earn God's favour when it's never been the way to God? Well, if the Law could never save you by keeping it why did God give it to Israel? Paul addresses this issue next. Not surprisingly, the whole point of the Law was actually to point you forward to Jesus.

## **Faith in Christ is the Only Way to Please God** **(3:10-14)**

Since Paul was just referring to the Old Testament he quotes what the Old Testament itself said about the Laws that God gave the Israelites in Mt. Sinai;

*<sup>10</sup> All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."<sup>11</sup> Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."<sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."*

It is somewhat ironic that God put toward the end of the Law in Deut. 27:26 that anyone who doesn't live by every law is under a curse.

### ***Failure to keep every law results in a curse (vv.10-12)***

We just saw that from the Old Testament and the New Testament is in full agreement;

*Rom. 3:22 There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

*James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*

And then Paul quotes that verse where it says, *'The righteous will live by faith'*. Oh yeah that verse in Romans right? Yes but it came from the Old Testament from the prophet Habakkuk 2:4 – which is in the Old Testament –. Salvation has always been by faith. These Galatian believers had fallen for bad teaching that said faith plus works = salvation. But Paul is showing from the Bible that has never been true.

The point of the law was that no one could keep it. All it could do was point out that you were imperfect; you sinned consistently and that you needed forgiveness through sacrifices consistently. But the sacrificial system pointed to something else that wasn't understood until Jesus showed up;

### ***Jesus became a curse so we would believe and live (vv.13-14)***

*<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." <sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

So Jesus was hung on a tree (cross) and though He was sinless He took our sin upon Himself. Since He was sinless He conquered death and paid the redemption price that God had been waiting for all this time. An unblemished human sacrifice. God sent Jesus Himself. God made salvation available to us. That's the only way to Him. And now we have to choose whether we believe that is enough for us to be saved. Like Abraham, we have to believe by faith that what God says about His Son's coming (whom we never met) to die on the cross for our sins in the past (an event we never witnessed) and rose from the dead (another event we never witnessed but we have the eyewitness account) actually happened and promises us that we who believe in these assurances and future promises about Jesus' return and our life with Him forever on the new earth will happen just as He said.

And now we continue to live by faith believing these promises every day to help us get through life's challenges and opposition to faith, so that the evidence of the Spirit's life in us will result in people asking us about the hope we have.

Sometimes we too are guilty of living by works even though we are saved by faith. We think that we will please God just because we read the Daily Bread today or just because we prayed today or because we packed a shoebox. We don't earn God's favour by these good deeds. We already have God's love and acceptance because we are His children. As a parent what gives you more pleasure, that your child cleaned his/her room or washed the dishes because you told them and promised them a reward of some kind? Or because they did it without being told not looking for any reward?

How are you walking with God? As a way of trying to make God happy and give you rewards of a problem free life? To twist God's arm so He'll answer your prayers? To impress God so He'll say your better than others? That's not living by faith. Living by faith means obeying God out of love for Him knowing that He is pleased with that alone. Trusting Him to meet our needs. Speaking up for Him when others oppose Him. Meeting other's needs when we're tempted to keep it for ourselves.

Reading His Word daily because we just want to know Him more and know how to be more like Jesus. Praying not to get but to give our hearts to Him and ask Him to do things in our life and others that seem humanly impossible but are divinely possible.

Paul said this as well about Abraham in Rom. 4:20 when he was still waiting for God to give him a child even though the mirror showed him new grey hairs and wrinkles every morning: *Rom. 4:20 Yet he did not waver through un-belief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

That's how to live by faith; being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what He says He will do.

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