

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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**Series:** Special Messages  
**Text:** Galatians 2:21 – 3:1 - 14  
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## O FOOLISH EVANGELICALS!

**S**teve Schissel, one of the more vocal advocates of the *Federal Vision*, in commenting on Jesus' words in Luke 10:25 – 37 boldly declared: "It is effrontery, an insult, to suggest that Jesus's answer, 'Do this and you will live,' was anything other than plain truth... It was Christ teaching that obedience to the law was something very do-able and that such obedience, includes repentance and faith, does save."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say: "God has peppered his Word with a lot of 'or-elses,' so many that no one could miss them. But while the or-elses couldn't be missed, they could be mis-assigned, as if they belonged to the Law and not to the Gospel. This is a false division, of course. It is a division, however, famously *rejected* by Calvinists!... Of course Christ has become a new Moses!"<sup>2</sup> Another member of this group, Rich Lusk, underscores the *Federal Vision's*, emphasis on the conditional nature of justification by asserting: "With regards to justification, this means that my right standing before the Father is grounded in Christ's own right standing before the Father. *So long as I abide in Christ*, I can no more come under the Father's negative judgment than Jesus himself can (italics mine)!"<sup>3</sup> In similar language new perspective sympathizer Don Garlington (who studied under Norman Shepherd at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in the 1970's) puts it in commenting on Romans 8:1: 'not withstanding our many failures, there is no condemnation *as long as we desire* to remain within the covenant bond, true to Christ the Lord' (italics mine).<sup>4</sup> Notice what is being said here: Instead of being justified by *faith alone* through the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ we are told that our justification is contingent upon our own evangelical righteousness that flows out of our covenantal faithfulness. Scott Clark rightly observes that this is nothing new. "This inversion of law and gospel to grace and obligation has found formal acceptance as one of the positions of the mainline Presbyterian Church (USA) and also among conservative evangelicals such as Daniel Fuller and among Reformed theologians such as Klaas Schilder and Norman Shepherd. They neither collapse history into the decree like Barth nor share Barth's doctrine of Scripture. Nevertheless, they do follow his move to obliterate the distinction between the covenants of works and grace and the distinction between law and gospel. *Consequently, they establish a grace-and-obligation scheme in which to construct their doctrines of justification.* This is the structural impetus for revising the doctrine of justification by rejecting the imputation of Christ's active obedience and to revise the definition of faith as its functions in justification. Having received initial grace, now the emphasis falls on the obligation to cooperate with grace."<sup>5</sup> Paul's epistles to the Romans and the Galatians contain his understanding of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. In Galatians we have his forceful defense of his doctrine. This is taken primarily from a negative standpoint. He is repeatedly telling the Galatians what the gospel is *not*, in order to *clearly* state what it really is. In the first two chapters he has defended his authority as an apostle in order to substantiate his message. The proposition first stated in 1:1 and again in 1:11, 12 is supported by seven arguments which terminate in 2:21. The *theologia argumentativa* occupies Chapters 3 and 4. Throughout these two chapters, the pivotal issue around which Paul builds his case is *GRACE*. If it is truly grace, then works cannot be involved (cf. Ephesians 2:5 - 9 and 2 Corinthians 12:9). Grace supplies the new principle of life by which the Christian lives to the glory of God. It is imperative that we grasp the fundamental significance of this Pauline argument.

### I. PAUL'S INDICTMENT: You Bunch of Simpletons!

I can't imagine Paul poring over the pages of Andrew Carnegie's best seller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People!* He was too honest to be insincere and manipulative in his dealing with people.

#### A. The Unreflecting Galatians

He calls them "foolish." Actually, the word he uses is more direct. ANOËTOS is made up from the Greek alpha privative (the prefix "a" turns a word into a negative) and the verbal adjective, NOËTOS to have intelligence. Paul is not saying the Galatians were mentally deficient, but they were certainly guilty of thoughtlessness. They were mentally lazy and careless. You can see in this one verse that Paul *expected* Christians to think theologically about the issues of life.

#### B. The Gullible Galatians

Paul uses another vivid word. "Who has *bewitched* you?" EBASKANEN is used only here in the New Testament. It means to cast a magic spell over someone so as to fascinate. It denotes the blighting of the evil eye.<sup>6</sup>

### II. PAUL'S APPEAL: Remember the Cross

There may be an intentional play on words in Paul's use of the word "eyes." Paul is accusing them of having *eye trouble*. Someone put the evil eye on them and they lost sight of the cross.

#### A. Paul's Portrait of Christ

He had clearly and consistently preached the cross as the central focus of his gospel. The fact that the participle "crucified" lacks the article indicates that the Apostle is here underscoring the character in which he set Christ before

the eyes of the Galatians. This specifically refers to the *doctrinal* nature of Paul’s preaching. “It is a bold declaration that the heart of the message of salvation concerns the merits of the crucified Savior, not human good works, even of a religious type.”<sup>7</sup> When Paul says he “clearly portrayed” (PROGRAPHŌ, to openly display in public) Christ as crucified, he is not merely alluding to the manner of Christ’s death (other people had undergone crucifixion), but is underscoring the *meaning* of Christ’s death. The atoning nature of Christ’s death was the central theme in Paul’s preaching. Listen to Calvin: “Let those who want to discharge the ministry of the Gospel aright learn not only to speak and declaim but also to penetrate into consciences, so that men may see Christ crucified and that His blood may flow. When the Church has such painters as these she no longer needs wood and stone, that is, dead images, she no longer requires any pictures. And certainly images and pictures were first admitted to Christian temples when, partly, the pastors had become dumb and were mere shadows (*idola*), partly, when they uttered a few words from the pulpit so coldly and superficially that the power and efficacy of the ministry were utterly extinguished.”<sup>8</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** The great Scottish Puritan, Robert Traill, witnessed similar attempts to distort the Reformation’s doctrine of *Sola Fide* in his lifetime. In reflecting upon our passage he wrote: “—My friends, I would have you consider this with yourselves, and this one thought may serve to rectify many mistakes: —Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die to make hard things easy, to make a hard way to heaven easy; but Christ died to make impossible things *certain*. He did not die to make it more easy to get to heaven than it was before; but he died to make *certain* a way to heaven, that was *impossible* before. Rom. viii. 3. *What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh:* —and again, Gal. iii. 21. *If there had been a law that could have given righteousness, verily righteousness had been by the law.* But because there was no law that could give righteousness to man, therefore Christ came to bring about that which was altogether impossible.”<sup>9</sup> John Colquhoun, another of the great Scottish preachers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, solemnly warned, “It is one thing to be justified by faith merely as an instrument by which a man receives the righteousness of Christ, and another to be justified for faith as an act or work of the law. If a sinner, then, relies on his actings of faith or works of obedience to any of the commands of the law for a title to eternal life, he seeks to be justified by the works of the law as much as if his works were perfect. If he depends, either in whole or in part, on his faith and repentance for a right to any promised a blessing, he thereby so annexes that promise to the commands to believe and repent as to form them for himself into a covenant of works. Building his confidence before God upon his faith, repentance, and other acts of obedience to the law, he places them in Christ’s stead as his grounds of right to the promise; and so he demonstrates himself to be of the works of the law, and so to be under the curse (Galatians 3:10)... If a man tries to connect his own performances with the righteousness of Jesus Christ for the pardon of his sins and the acceptance of his person as righteous in the sight of God, he deprives himself of all benefit from that perfect righteousness. If he relies on his own *works of obedience for even the smallest part of his title to eternal life, he is a debtor to the whole law in its covenant form, and he fixes himself under the dreadful curse of it.* Christ will profit him nothing unless he relies on His infinitely glorious righteousness only for all his title to justification and eternal life. A sinner depends on the righteousness of Christ for justification to no good purpose if he does not rely on it only, and neither in whole in part on his own obedience.”<sup>10</sup> The Galatians took their eyes off the cross of Christ and began to look elsewhere. They had come under the evil-eyed Judaizers and had thoughtlessly followed their baleful teachings. This is still a snare today! Any teaching that detracts from the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning death—any rite or experience, no matter how it claims to be drawn from Scripture (the Judaizers could quote a lot of Scripture), that draws our attention away from Christ and Him crucified must be declared for what it really is—a false (and bewitching) teaching, the gravity of which cannot be exaggerated.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Christopher Hutchinson, “A Reply to ‘A New Way of Seeing?’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (ed. E. Calvin Beisner; Fort Lauderdale, FL.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 53, quoting Steve Schissel’s comments in *Christian Renewal* (April 28, 2003), p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Steve M. Schissel, “A New Way of Seeing?” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (ed. E. Calvin Beisner; Fort Lauderdale, FL.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Rich Lusk, “A Response to ‘the Biblical Plan of Salvation,’” in *The Auburn Avenue Theology, Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (ed. E. Calvin Beisner; Fort Lauderdale, FL.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> As cited by G. L. W. Johnson in *Risking The Truth: Handling Error in the Church* ed. Martin Downes, (Christian Focus, 2009), p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> R. Scott Clark in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (P & R, 2007), p. 351.

<sup>6</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Macmillan, 1869), p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Believers Chapel, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, ed. D.W. Torrance & T.F. Torrance (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> *The Works of Robert Traill IV* (rpt. The Banner of Truth, 1975), p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> John Colquhoun, *A Treatise On The Law and The Gospel* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1999), pp. 19, 142.