

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Sixth Petition (Part VIII)

The English lexicographer, writer and indefatigable logician, Samuel Johnson (1709-84), had the perfect reply to the man who has not yet been convinced by sufficient proof: “Sir, I have found you an argument; but I am not obliged to find you an understanding.”¹ 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 bestseller, *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. ANOETOS is made up from the Greek alpha privative (the prefix “a” turns a word into a negative) and the verbal adjective NOETOS, 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. John MacArthur writes,

“The Christian life is neither entered nor lived on the basis of good feelings or attractive inclinations but on the basis of God’s truth in Christ. Christians who rely on self-oriented emotions instead of Scripture-oriented minds are doomed to be ‘tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming’ (Eph. 4:14). When they judge an idea on the basis of how good it makes them feel or how nice it sounds rather than on the basis of its harmony with God’s Word, they are in serious spiritual danger.

“Most cult members did not become involved because they were intellectually convinced the doctrines of the cult were true but because its teachings and practices were appealing. Their minds were not persuaded; their emotions were victimized.

“Paul pleaded with the Roman believers, ‘I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, ... not [to] be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect’ (Rom.

12:1-2). He urged the Ephesian believers to ‘be renewed in the spirit of [their] mind’ (Eph. 4:23) and the Colossians to ‘put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him’ (Col. 3:10). Godly faith and obedience are established by the mind, not by the emotions. Being told that one can please God by certain behavior is very appealing to the ego, which is always looking for means of glory, ways to tell itself and others how good it is.

“The faithful, effective Christian life, however, is not simply a great emotional adventure filled with wonderful feelings and experiences. It is first of all the humble pursuit of God’s truth and will and of conformity to it. The obedient Christian experiences joy and satisfaction beyond measure, far exceeding that of superficial believers who constantly seek spiritual ‘highs.’ Life in Christ is not sterile and joyless. But true joy, happiness, satisfaction, and all other such feelings are by-products of knowing and obeying God’s truth.”²

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.³

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.

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.”⁴ When Paul says he “clearly portrayed” (PROGRAPHO, 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.”⁵

III. **PAUL’S DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL OF FREE GRACE, APART FROM THE WORKS OF THE LAW**

Three Witnesses to the Shortcomings of Legalism, 3:1-14

1. The Galatians’ experience, 3:1-5. They did not receive the Spirit through obedience to the law but through believing the gospel Paul proclaimed to them.
2. Abraham’s example, 3:6-9. Abraham was justified by faith alone and not by circumcision.
3. The Law’s expectation, 3:10-14. If one is going to follow the way of the law for righteousness, then he must keep it perfectly; because no one can do so, all men stand under its curse.⁶

IV. THE “PRINCIPLE DOCTRINE” OF LAW-GOSPEL DISTINCTION

One of the lesser-known but important early Reformed theologians is Caspar Olevian (d. 1587), who may have had a hand in writing the Heidelberg Catechism. One of the many Reformed truths Olevian taught is the distinction between law and gospel. Scott Clark summarizes Olevian’s distinction (I’ve underlined Olevian’s words for clarity):

“Law and gospel perform radically different functions in the economy of justification. It is only from the law that one knows sin and only from the gospel that one knows justification. It was out of this very commitment that [Olevian] argued that the gospel, not the law, is the ‘principle doctrine’ of the Scriptures. For the law does not teach ‘how sin, the wrath of God, and eternal death, are removed, but rather the principle life-giving doctrine, by the outpouring of the Spirit of God was, is, and shall be, the promise of the Gospel.’

“Indeed, like Luther, Olevian interpreted the entire book of Galatians as being about nothing more than the distinction between law and gospel: ‘The sum of the Epistle is to teach what is that righteousness by which we are able to stand before God, that is to say that it is not from the law, but from the Gospel.’ Likewise, he also read the Epistle to the Romans through the lenses of his law-gospel dichotomy. At the beginning of the commentary, he made it clear that it was at the heart of his conception of the evangelium (gospel).

“Thus the Holy Spirit constantly affirms through Paul that the doctrine of the gospel about the forgiveness of sins and eternal life given freely for the sake of the Son to those who believe, is not in any new way. But from the beginning of the world Christ was promised with his gospel. In order that this might be understood, the distinction between law and gospel must be considered.

“Olevian wasn’t at odds with Reformed theology when he taught the law-gospel distinction. Indeed, the law-gospel distinction is a **big part of Reformed/Reformation theology.**”⁷

CONCLUSION: 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! Somebody is always offering gullible Christians some so-called blessing. 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

¹ Cited by A.J. Hoover, *Don’t You Believe It! Poking Holes in Faulty Logic* (Chicago: Moody, 1982), p. 117.

² *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Moody, 1987), p. 64.

³ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. 132

⁴ S. Lewis Johnson, *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Dallas: Believers Chapel, 1978), p. 2.

⁵ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, ed. D.W. Torrance & T.F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 147.

⁶ This section is adapted from Robert Strimple, *Paul: Missionary Theologian* (Mentor, 2002), p. 134.

⁷ R. Scott Clark, *Caspar Olevian and The Substance of The Covenant: Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2006) pp. 149-150, as cited by Shane Lewis, *The Reformed Reader*. Jan. 23, 2017.