

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Galatians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	14		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Galatians 3:1		
Date:	May 3, 2026 (a.m.)		

O FOOLISH GALATIANS

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 argumentative* 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. Thomas Schreiner succinctly captures the matter when he points out, “Here we need to remind ourselves of what Paul says about the law. The phrase *works of the law* is found six times in Galatians. We are informed three times in Galatians 2:16 that justification doesn’t come via works of the law. In 3:2 and 3:5 Paul emphasizes that one does not receive the Spirit by works of the law, while in 3:10 he declares that works of the law lead to a curse. Similarly, 2:21 affirms that righteousness is not attained or obtained through the law. In 3:11 Paul affirms that it is obvious and clear that no one is justified by the law, while in 5:4 we discover that those who are attempting to be justified by the law have fallen from grace. The opposition between law and grace in the letter is pervasive and illuminating. Since the law enjoins obedience, it isn’t a distortion of what Paul writes to see an emphasis on doing, on human performance, on obedience. Grace, on the other hand, emphasizes God’s work, his supernatural power, and the gift granted to human beings. We see this theme as well in Romans 11:6, where Paul tells us that grace and works are fundamentally opposed.”²

I. PAUL’S INDICTMENT: *You Bunch of Simpletons!* I can’t imagine Paul poring over the pages of Andrew Carnegie’s bestseller, *How to Sin 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. *Anoētos* is made up from the Greek alpha privative (the prefix “a” turns a word

into a negative) and the verbal adjective *noētos*, 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. W. E. Vine correctly notes, “the meaning is, not that the Galatians were naturally stupid, senseless, but that they had not used their senses, else they would never have allowed themselves to be led into the absurd position in which they were found. The tone is certainly not that of contempt, nor is it so much that of indignation as of reproach, as in the Lord’s words on the way to Emmaus, Luke 24:25.”³

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.⁴

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.”⁵ When Paul says he “clearly portrayed” (*prographō*, 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.”⁶

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 stoning 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. Why is this important? The great B. B. Warfield in describing the heart of the Apostle Paul’s gospel wrote, “Now the presupposition of this Gospel, you will perceive, is a deep and keen sense of human sin and that in

the aspect of guilt. The reason why Paul's heart was filled with such joy at the thought of a reconciled God was that his heart was oppressed with a sense of guilt in the presence of a just God. A holy and righteous God, he knew, could not possibly look upon him, or his partners in guilt, without abhorrence and indignation. In his conscience the wrath of God was revealed against the abounding iniquity of men. O wretched men that we are, his soul of souls cried out, who shall deliver us from this mass of sin? It was because he felt so deeply and keenly the guilt of sin, and knew so clearly the depth and heinousness of his own and of the world's guilt, that he broke out with such rejoicing at the sight of a reconciled God, and made the proclamation of His reconciliation his Gospel – the substance of the glad tidings which he bore to a sin-stricken and hopeless race.”⁷

ENDNOTES

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

² T. R. Schreiner, *Christ Crucified: A Theology of Galatians* (Crossway, 2024), p. 78.

³ W. E. Vine, *Expository Commentary on Galatians* (Nelson, 1997), p. 70.

⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Macmillan, 1869), p. 132.

⁵ S. Lewis Johnson, *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Believers Chapel, 1978), p. 2.

⁶ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, ed. D. W. Torrance & T. F. Torrance (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 147.

⁷ B. B. Warfield, *The Saviour of The World* (rpt. Mack Publishing, 1972), p. 100.