

INTRODUCTION

How many of you remember the sit-com “Bewitched” from the 1960s? When it debuted, ABC was a distant third to NBC and CBS, but the popularity of shows like the “Jetsons” and “Bewitched” moved ABC up to the same level to make the “big three networks.”

Elizabeth Montgomery played a lovable witch named Samantha who was married to a mortal named Darren. See if you can answer these “Bewitched” trivia questions: What was Samantha’s mother’s name? Endora. What was the name of her bumbling aunt? Aunt Clara. What was the name of their first child? Tabitha. My favorite character was the neighbor down the street, who kept witnessing Samantha’s trickery, but her husband never believed her, do you remember her name? Gladys Kravitz.

You may think “Bewitched” is a strange title for a message from Galatians, but that’s exactly the word Paul used to describe what was happening in the churches in Galatia. The word *bewitched* means, “to place under one’s power by or as by magic; cast a spell over.”

Paul founded the churches by preaching that salvation comes by grace and grace alone. But some sneaky teachers had infiltrated the congregations and “bewitched the believers” into accepting another gospel. It was as if a false teacher had come in, wiggled his nose, and said, “Here’s the REAL truth about salvation. If you keep the Jewish rules and regulations, you’ll go to heaven. Guys, you’ve got to be circumcised. And you can’t eat pork. You must keep the Sabbath Day rules as well.” (wiggle nose) And the bewitched believers said, “Oh. Okay.”

In the first five verses of Galatians 3, Paul bombarded them with a six rhetorical questions. What is a rhetorical question? If you answered aloud, then you didn’t recognize that was a rhetorical question. A rhetorical question doesn’t expect an answer; it’s really more of an accusation. Guys, if you’re married, chances are you recognize a rhetorical question, because many wives are skillful with them. For instance, when your wife asks, “Why don’t you listen to me?” she really doesn’t want you to answer that question, she’s actually telling you, “You’re not listening to me.” So the next time your wife asks, “Why don’t you listen to me?” DON’T say, “Because I don’t care about what you’re saying.” If you answer that way, chances are you’ll get more than a rhetorical question!

As we look at our text, remember chapter and verse divisions weren’t part of the original scriptures. There really shouldn’t be a break here, so we’ll start reading in Galatians 2:21.

Galatians 2:21–3:5. “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! You foolish Galatians! [J.B. Phillips translation: “O, dear idiots”] Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. 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? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”

After Paul's powerful testimony of Galatians 2:20, he warns about the danger of "setting aside the grace of God." Now, you may be thinking, "Well, those first century Christians might have been bewitched, but in the 21st century, there's no way I can be spiritually bewitched." That's a dangerous attitude, because our real enemy is the same one those believers faced. Our true enemy isn't some false teacher; our real enemy is the devil, whom Jesus called "the Liar." Martin Luther knew a thing or two about false teaching and he wrote this about this passage: "Satan is clever. He does not only bewitch men in a crude manner, but also in a more artful fashion. He bedevils the minds of men with hideous fallacies. There is not one among us who is not at times seduced by Satan into false beliefs. The tricky devil can make a lie look like the truth. Since he has this uncanny ability to make us believe a lie until we would swear a thousand times it were the truth, we must not be proud, but walk in fear and humility, and call upon the Lord Jesus to save us from temptation."

This is a timely message, because there are many people in our churches today who have "set aside" the wonderful truth of grace, and have reverted back to a performance mindset of earning God's blessing. Paul mentions three negative consequences of "setting aside the grace of God."

1. To set aside the grace of God is to: REJECT THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Paul's first argument was that he had preached to them about the crucifixion of Christ. He wrote, "Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified." The language Paul used indicated that when he preached on the cross he didn't just say, "Christ died for your sins." He went into the horrible details of the suffering of Christ on the cross. He painted a verbal portrait of Jesus dying. Paul hadn't witnessed the crucifixion personally, but he had heard it described by the other apostles, and he had spent time with Jesus as well.

The night I gave my life to Christ as a 9-year-old boy, the pastor preached on the crucifixion of Jesus and described it very graphic terms. He talked about the crown of thorns, and the horrible beating Jesus received. He spoke about the nails being driven into the hands and feet of Jesus. I'll never forget it. He painted a verbal portrait of Jesus on the cross. On that night I realized for the first time that Jesus died for my sins, and I gave my heart to Christ.

In spite of that, could you ever imagine me saying, "Sure Jesus went to the cross, but it's not enough. If I really want to go to heaven, I have to also obey the Ten Commandments and follow other rules." For me to do that would be to reject the work of Jesus on the cross.

But that's exactly what the Christians in Galatia had done. They lost focus of the cross. Eugene Peterson translates Galatians 3:1 this way in *The Message*: "You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has happened, for it's obvious that you no longer have the crucified Jesus in clear focus in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough."

These false teachers had hypnotized them into thinking the cross wasn't enough. And the Christians in Galatia fell for the hoax.

The greatest con artist in American history was George C. Parker. After the Brooklyn Bridge opened in NYC in 1883, George C. Parker saw a tourist admiring it, so he decided to try selling it to him. It was so easy, he decided to sell it again. Over a period of years he averaged selling the Brooklyn Bridge twice a week to unsuspecting tourists. He sold it for as little as \$50 and for as much as \$50,000. He convinced the buyers they could make a fortune charging a toll. He would produce official looking papers to sign the deal. On many occasions police had to stop the "new owners" from erecting toll booths on "their bridge." Parker was so successful that he branched out to sell Madison Square Garden and Grant's Tomb as well (he posed as Grant's grandson). Parker was arrested for fraud three times and in 1928 was sentenced to life in prison. He was sent to Sing-Sing where he died, but not before selling the bridge again to at least two other prisoners and a prison guard!

You wonder how people could be so gullible. Today, people are still falling for internet and telephone scams. But the most dangerous scam of all is to reject the work of Jesus on the cross and replace it with keeping rules and observing rituals.

I carry a graphic picture of Jesus dying on the cross for me in my mind. All I have to do is close my eyes and I can see Him there suffering in agony. It's not a sanitized, religious depiction. Instead it is a graphic scene of torture and agony. A few years ago when the movie "The Passion of the Christ" was released, many Christians were surprised because it was rated R for graphic violence. As gruesome as the movie is, I believe that movie fell short of portraying the depth of suffering Jesus endured. Have you lost a clear picture of the cross? Will you ask God to give you a mental photograph of Jesus dying on the cross for you? If you can see the cross, then you know that any attempt to be good enough or do enough good deeds will never replace it.

2. To set aside the grace of God is to: REDUCE THE VALUE OF SUFFERING

Paul asked them to remember how much they had suffered because of their faith. He wrote, "Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing?" Sacrificial worship was a part of the Jewish faith as well as the pagan religions of the Romans. The Jews sacrificed animals at the Temple in Jerusalem, and the pagan religions sacrificed prepared food to their idols as well.

Making sacrifices is something a worshipper DID to make them feel good about their worship. "Look at me, I'm so religious that I'm making a sacrificial offering to my god." But the gospel of grace teaches that the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the only offering we need. Christians refused to practice sacrificial rituals—and they were persecuted for their faith.

In the Roman Empire, the pagan priests would have welcomed Jesus as one of their many gods. They could have just made Him His own little niche in their pantheon of gods like Jupiter, Mars, and Venus. But the Christians refused. They claimed there was only ONE God and that Jesus was God in the flesh. They claimed His death was the only sacrifice needed. This put them at odds with both the Jews and the pagan religious. The Romans persecuted them as atheists because they refused to worship Jesus alongside their other Roman gods.

Many of the men lost their jobs when they became a Christian, because they refused to recognize

the false god of their trade guild. But there was much worse persecution than losing a job. Nero hated Christians and had them arrested and tortured. He had Christians from his dungeon dipped in tar and tied to the trees in his gardens. He then had his soldiers set fire to them so he would have light in his gardens to ride his horse at night.

The cross gave strength and courage to suffering Christians. Their attitude was, "Jesus was innocent and they tortured him, so it is an honor to share in the fellowship of his sufferings."

So Paul appeals to their suffering and asks, "If you can earn your salvation, and the cross wasn't necessary, then what's the value of your suffering?"

It is not only God's grace that saves you; it is His grace that sustains you in times of suffering. In 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote about "a thorn in the flesh." This was some kind of painful condition he endured. He described it as a "messenger from Satan to torment me." (2 Corinthians 12:7). He begged God three times to take it away, but the Lord didn't answer that prayer. Instead God promised him, "My grace is sufficient for you."

When you connect suffering with legalism, you fall into the bottomless pit of thinking you are suffering because you aren't being "good enough" and the best way to remove the suffering is to redouble your efforts to be more religious.

After preaching for almost 42 years you can imagine I've been asked thousands of questions about the Bible. The #1 question I've been asked more than any other goes something like this: "Pastor, my life is a mess. If God loves me, why is He allowing me to go through this pain? Have I lost my salvation?"

My answer is that you CANNOT lose your salvation. Once you have accepted God's offer of grace and been born again by His Spirit, you become a child of God. There is nothing in heaven or on earth that can cause you to lose that relationship with God. Your salvation is secure. However, it is possible to fall from the teaching of grace. Later in the letter Paul writes, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace." (Galatians 5:4) They had set aside God's grace and because they were suffering, they were seeking to alleviate their pain by obeying rules and regulation. When they reverted to legalism and their pain remained, they just became more guilt-ridden. The bewitched believers in Galatia faced the danger of falling from the teaching of grace into the trap of legalism.

There is great value in suffering. No one wants to suffer, but God can teach you a great deal about faith during your times of suffering. I've discovered in my own life that it is during the times of suffering and sorrow that I learn more about the heart of God. I've often quoted the little poem: "I walked a mile with laughter; she chatted all the way; but I was none the wiser for all she had to say; I walked a mile with sorrow; and not a word said she; but oh, the things I learned; when sorrow walked with me."

When you are struggling, don't set the grace of God aside; instead, depend on His amazing grace to sustain you through your suffering.

3. To set aside the grace of God is to: **RESIST THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Paul's strongest objection to legalism was that it denied the work of the Holy Spirit. He wrote, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

Let me try to illustrate the folly of setting aside grace for legalism. Do you remember some of the first cell phones? Twenty-one years ago when I was pastor in Birmingham, Alabama, Jerry Yandell and some other members of Green Acres had contacted me and asked me to pray about the possibility of moving to Tyler. I can remember talking to him on my high-tech cell phone. It was a large, heavy handset with a little black rubber antenna. It was the about the same size and weight as a brick. If you had one of those phones and got attacked you could use it as a weapon. It didn't play music, or take pictures, or keep my calendar. It didn't do email, because email wasn't invented yet. All you could do was talk on it, and a lot of the time you couldn't even do that.

Today I have an iPhone 4S. It's tiny and light. It has more computing power in it than all the computing power in NASA when they put a man on the moon in 1969. It plays music and movies, it takes pictures, and it updates my calendar wirelessly. I check my email on it and send text messages. It can even tell me where to eat (Siri). Oh, yeah, and it's a phone, also.

What if you gave me a choice of using that old cell phone brick, or this iPhone? Can you imagine me setting aside the iPhone and picking up the brick and deciding it was a better choice? The only way I would make that choice is if I had lost my mind, or if someone had hypnotized me. That's why Paul was astonished; they had set aside grace (the iPhone), and gone back to the law (old technology). This old phone doesn't even work anymore—and neither does legalism.

You might have read the news article a few weeks ago where the U.S. House passed a bill to make "In God we Trust" our national motto. President Obama commented on it by saying, "I trust in God, but God wants us to help ourselves by putting people back to work." His press secretary, Jay Carney tried to clarify his statement, but all he did was muddy the waters even more. He said, "I believe The President was referring to the phrase from the Bible, 'God helps those who help themselves.'" Oops, that's NOT in the Bible. Someone wrote on my Facebook page that they were sending two copies of my book, No, That's NOT in the Bible, to the White House. I seriously doubt the books will be read. But that's a widespread belief about God. People think God needs our help. Sure God can save me, but I have to HELP Him save me by doing all the "thou shalt's" and avoiding all the "thou shalt not's."

It is the Holy Spirit who saves us and it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us (that means He is gradually making us more like Jesus.) The Bible says, "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you [that's the Holy Spirit], will carry it on until completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

The difference between human performance and grace is the difference between a rowboat and a sailboat. If you're in a rowboat and you want to get to the other side of the lake, it's pretty clear

what you've got to do: You take those oars in your hands and by the sweat and toil of your strength you row the boat across the lake. Your strength is limited and if you get tired you have to stop and rest. However, in a sailboat, all you have to do is hoist the sail and the wind fills it and moves you across the lake. The New Testament word for spirit is *pneuma*, which also means "wind." Too many people have been bewitched into thinking that human effort and human goodness will get them to heaven. They have blisters on their spiritual hands and their spiritual muscles are worn out. However, salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit. When we offer God our life, the Holy Spirit, God's mighty wind, fills our lives and moves us from death to life.

Dwight L. Moody was a shoe salesman from Chicago who fell in love with Jesus and started sharing his faith with everyone he met. Even though he was never ordained or had formal training, God used him to reach thousands for Christ as an evangelist. There was a group of British pastors who were planning a crusade and the name of D. L. Moody came up as a possible preacher. One British pastor said with skepticism: "Why do we need this Mr. Moody? He's unordained, uneducated, and inexperienced. Who does he think he is? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" But another, wiser pastor, who had heard D.L. Moody preach responded, "Mr. Moody doesn't have a monopoly on the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Mr. Moody."

That's a good question for each of us to ask: Does the Holy Spirit have a monopoly on me? Does He have a monopoly on my time, my priorities, and my treasure?

CONCLUSION

If you've ever flown into New York City, chances are you've heard of LaGuardia Airport. The airport is named after Fiorello LaGuardia, who was mayor of New York City from 1934 to 1945. LaGuardia was a colorful character and a "hands-on" mayor. He would show up at fires to give encouragement to the firemen. He often slipped into a municipal courtroom and take over the duties of the judge, since he was the chief magistrate.

During the depths of the depression, LaGuardia was presiding over a case where a woman wearing a tattered coat was brought before him and charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She explained that her daughter's husband had abandoned her, leaving her with two hungry children, and she had stolen the bread for her starving grandchildren. The storekeeper refused to drop the charges. He said, "My store is in a real bad neighborhood, your honor, and she must be punished to teach other people in the neighborhood a lesson."

LaGuardia sighed as he announced the verdict to the woman. He said, "I've got to punish you. The law is clear. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." But as he was pronouncing the judgment he reached into his pocket and pulled out a ten-dollar bill and tossed it into his hat. He said, "Here is your fine, which I remit. And furthermore I'm going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a grandmother has to steal bread so her grandchildren can eat."

He handed his hat to the bailiff and said, "Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines." The next morning the newspaper reported that \$47.50 was turned over to the woman, which included fifty cents from the storeowner. Some seventy petty criminals and NYC policemen also donated to the pot.

That's a powerful picture of the gospel of God's grace. Like that lady, we stand guilty before the judge; caught red-handed in our sin. A just God knows the penalty must be paid. Yet He is full of mercy. He stepped in and gave His most precious possession, His Son, to pay the penalty for our sins. But grace doesn't end there. Not only does God pay our penalty, He showers us with the blessings of salvation, life in the Holy Spirit, which beats \$47.50 any day!

So, don't let the devil or some false teacher bewitch you. Salvation is by grace through faith, so don't fall back into the trap of legalism.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes