

Galatians 3:1-9

Foolish Christians?

In November of 1978, 913 members of a cult known as the Peoples Temple committed a combination mass suicide and murder in northern Guyana at a site called, Jonestown. The charismatic leader of Jonestown, was Jim Jones, a preacher who set up the Peoples Temple in San Francisco before moving his followers to South America.

Jones claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus, Buddha, & Lenin. He dominated his congregation and controlled their every move. He used drugs and sexually abused both men and women.

Who was Jim Jones, he was a former Methodist preacher who led many other people with a Christian background off the deep end.

During the 1970's and 80's David Berg developed a following of thousands known as The Children of God. He built his organization by reaching out to hippies and druggies. David Berg, who called himself Moses David had sexual relations with young girls saying God had OK'd it.

Who was David Berg? A former Christian Missionary Alliance minister.

In 1981 a young man named Vernon Howell joined a group called Branch Davidians.

He became a leader and in 1990 changed his name to David Koresh. His followers lived on a compound they called "Mount Carmel" in Waco Texas.

Koresh would lecture his followers with sermons that sometimes lasted for 15 hours. He believed God sent him down to be a sinful Jesus so that, when God stood in judgement of sinners on Judgement Day, he would have experience of all sin and degradation.

Koresh demanded sexual favors from girls as young as 12. After a gun battle and then a 51 day siege, on April 19, 1993, Koresh and 75 of his followers burned to death after an FBI raid set off a massive fire .

Who was Vernon Howell? He was was raised in the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

If you would have polled the followers of Jim Jones, David Berg, and David Koresh you would have been amazed at how many of them had backgrounds in evangelical churches. In fact some of those in key leadership positions in their organizations had backgrounds in churches that taught and respected the Bible.

What happened?

Actually false teachers who twist Scripture aren't anything new. All the way back into the infancy of Christianity there were people who used the Bible to get a following.

In a way that was fortunate for us. Because false teachers were a problem from day one, several of our New Testament letters are "how to's" on dealing with corruptions of the truth.

Of course today we're being told that there is no truth. We're told that all religions are equally valid. All worship the same God and all lead to the same end.

The total foolishness of that kind of thinking is exposed as soon as you look at guys like Jim Jones and David Koresh. Their followers were so sincere they gave their lives. But no one in their right mind would say that they were following truth, or that their deaths honored God.

What does the Bible have to say by way of warning? What can we learn about spiritual deception?

Turn with me to Book of Gal pg 1034

Galatians is a New Testament letter that was written specifically to help people who had been influenced by a belief system that was false.

As we study the first 9 verse of Gal 3 this morning I'd like to try to answer some questions like; How do we help someone who's being influenced by a cult? How do we deal with people who teach dangerous stuff? How do we spot false teaching? And what happens if we're not careful about our own beliefs?

The Letter to the Galatians is a timeless epistle. It's teaching and it's truth are practical for us just like it was to first century believers.

Some NT books are practical in teaching us parenting skills, or how to handle money, or how to deal with life's problems. Galatians is practical because it deals with what we believe, and in the end what we believe is the basis for our actions.

Just to try to get our bearings here this morning so we can understand what's being said in our passage, let's quickly retrace our steps so far.

First of all, the author: Paul is the one who writes what God has inspired. Paul is a missionary church planter. At one time Christians feared him because he led a movement to stamp out Christianity.

But now he's radically changed. He trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as his savior and Paul is now a man on a mission to spread the word about forgiveness through the cross.

Galatia is located in the center of what is Turkey today. The Galatians listened to Paul's message of salvation by faith in Christ alone and believed.

Over time Paul left to go to the next area and as soon as he did, guys came into the congregation with a different take on things.

Teachers came in and said, "Sure you have to believe in Jesus Christ, but you also have to keep all of God's laws that He laid out for the Jews.

To be forgiven of your sins you have to keep the works of the Mosaic law.

The operative word is "works."

Regardless of what tag they might put on their system, anyone who tells you that you can earn God's forgiveness is contradicting the clear teaching of the Bible.

The OT says; *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* Isaiah 53:6

It says, Ps 32:2 *"Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."*

Why doesn't a person's sin count against them? If they're guilty, why are they forgiven? Because God laid their sin on Jesus at the cross.

The Bible says we're, "...born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever."

The Bible says we're forgiven through faith in the finished work of Christ. The Galatians believed this, but then were swayed by deceptive teachers.

Now, if all religions were the same and it didn't really matter what we believed, then what we're going to read today wouldn't make a bit of sense. In fact, most of the New Testament wouldn't make a bit of sense.

But, if there is such a thing as absolute truth, and if there is a heaven and a hell, then what we're reading today matters for ever. It's eternally significant.

How does a man of God handle this situation? How does he minister to these people that he loves, in order to steer them back to the truth?

For the past few weeks we've seen Paul argue from his own spiritual experience. Now he's going to show something absolutely crucial. Our experience has to be based on God's truth. Our experience may be subjective, but the Bible is objective.

So he's going to have two goals.

#1 He wants to show the Galatians that following the "works for salvation" theory is a contradiction, not only of his spiritual history, but of there's too.

#2 He wants to point out that this pilgrimage to faith wasn't just his and theirs, it goes all the way back to the father of the Jewish people, Abraham. Like, "If we're going to talk about the law of Moses, let's go ahead and go back farther than that."

As we begin Chapter 3, the first thing I'd like you to see is the real source of false teaching.

I. Satan Is The Author Of All False Religion

Read vs 1

That sounds kind of harsh, doesn't it? "You Galatians are foolish."

The word "foolish" in verse 1 is a translation of the Greek word *anoetos*. It's made up of the particle "a" which means "not" or "without" and the verb *noieo* means "to perceive with the mind, to understand, to ponder, or consider."

The Message translates this: *"You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses?"*

I think the question's meant to shake them up a little bit. Sometimes we tend to buy into philosophies without really thinking them through.

I was talking with someone who said they were an atheist. I asked them if they believed that it was OK for me to murder children if it made me happy.

They were shocked. They said, "Of course not." But when I asked them "why" they stumbled around to come up with an answer that didn't use words like "right," "wrong," or "immoral" because this person knew that if there was no God there was no basis for determining right or wrong.

Some times we need to ask questions to force people to think about the logical conclusion of what they're saying.

Paul asked this question in this way to get a rise out of the Galatians. He wanted them to actually realize they weren't thinking.

It's possible for Christians to think and act foolishly.

So here Paul asks the Galatians, "Why are you acting foolishly? Who's cast a spell over you?"

That's what the word "bewitched" means. The noun form of this verb was used by the Greeks to refer to an amulet used by Satan worshippers.

We can't see the conflict, we can see the results of it. But the Bible tells us there's a very real war going on in the spiritual realm.

Turn to Eph 6 pg 1041 Read 10-12

We need to be very careful that we don't confuse the physical with the spiritual. Sometimes we get the idea that we're battling against organizations. We think the problem is some cult or political group, but it really isn't flesh and blood that's the problem.

The problem is who stands behind those destructive philosophies and ideas. The Bible says it's Satan and his demons.

Satan isn't a guy with long red underwear and a pitch fork. If he was then he'd be real easy to spot. The Bible says he appears as an angel of light. He appears as a source of truth.

Back in Galatians Paul wrote in chapter 1 "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." Now he reinforces that by saying "Someone's put a spell on you. Someone's blinding you to the truth. ...before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified."

The Greek term translated "clearly portrayed" means "to depict or portray, before the eyes of people." It can be translated "posted," even "billboarded."

Now I want you to see the difference. This is telling.

On the one hand there's the false message. This one comes by enchantment.

On the other is the truth. This one's put out in the open. Up on the billboard for all to see.

One method is underhanded, secretive, and subtle. The other's is direct, open, and public. This is like the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is portrayed in Proverbs as publicly calling out, speaking forthrightly, inviting everyone to gain knowledge.

Folly is secretive and seductive; her appeal is to that which is either forbidden or unavailable to the masses. Error is sneaky while truth is straightforward. Error is offered to the elite_truth is offered to whosoever will come.

Watch out when any church or religious group says "Only we have the truth."

That was the message of jim Jones, David Koresh, and David Berg. It's the message of Mormonism, Jehovah's witnesses, and a thousand other groups. If you're not part of the group you're not part of God's family.

You know, Jehovah's Witnesses have their own translation of the Bible. It's called the New World Translation. If you look in the front of the New World Translation it tells about the history of the translation, it talks about the fact that there was a translation committee. The one thing it never does is tell you who was on the translation committee and how they did their work.

You can look on the watchtower.org web site, you can read all the publications, but the guys who did the translation are never named.

You can look up the names of the translators of every other English version. We know all about the 47 godly men who worked on the translation committee of the KJV in 1611. We know the NASB translators. It's the same for the NKJV, the NIV, even the Message.

We know who they were, where they got their education, what their doctrinal background was. We know how they did the translation work. How they divided up the work. What checks and balances they put in place.

All that's out in the open for everyone to see. Nothing to hide.

You don't have to belong to FCC to go to heaven. In fact, it's possible to go to this church for your whole life and end up in hell when you die.

You say, Ed, how could that happen? It could happen if all you have is a little religion, and you never have a relationship with the living God. It can happen if your'e trusting in anything else but Jesus Christ to get you there.

Sometimes people think that Satan is against religion. Just the opposite is true. Satan loves religion. He loves for people to get all caught up with all kinds of religious ceremonies and trappings just as long as in the end their faith is in their religion instead of in the Son of God.

The Galatians were bewitched by the greatest religionist of all time; that old serpent the devil.

In the garden of Eden Satan showed us most of his tools and methods.

He questioned God's Word. He denied God's Word. He misused God's Word. He questioned God's character, he appealed to man's pride.

Jesus called Satan, "The father of lies." He's called the great deceiver.

What's the root of all false religion? When you strip away the characters and the organizations, ultimately you're left with the Prince of Darkness.

I think it's significant that at the time of the first coming of Jesus there was such a flurry of demonic activity that took place. A large part of Jesus' ministry was casting out demons and freeing people from demonic bondage.

Now, in our day, as we draw closer and closer to the time of the second coming of Jesus, demonic activity is on the increase. How do I know that? Look at the multiplicity of religions that are springing up all around and capturing people's allegiance.

What's the real, ultimate source of false religion? Satan and his minions bewitching people so that they don't obey the truth of the gospel.

If all this is true, what can we say to friends, family members, the guy in the cubical next to us at work who have been put under a spell?

How did Paul deal with the Galatians?

He didn't throw up his hands and say, "They're a lost cause. There's no hope for them."

I. Satan Is The Author Of All False Religion

No one was more certain of that than Paul.

II. The Bible Is The Objective Source Of Truth

What got the Galatians in such a mess? How did thousands go from being every day, ordinary people to followers of Jim Jones and David Koresh? I believe it was a sheer lack of logical reasoning.

The Bible is a spiritual book. In one way it's unlike any other book. Only the Bible is "God breathed." Only the Bible is God's Word. Only the Bible's inerrant.

But here's the part people forget. The Bible is a book. It's written in words. It follows rules of grammar and syntax. God expects us to use logic and basic methods of interpretation with the Bible, just like we would with any other book.

So notice this logical, probing question: **Read vs 2-3**

He says, "I just want to ask you one thing. Think for a moment." Here's what gets us in trouble. Something sounds convincing and we don't think.

So here's the question for the Galatians: "Did the Holy Spirit enter your lives because you put your faith in Christ, or because you followed the works of the Law?"

Now remember, these people were Gentiles. They were non-Jews. They never had anything to do with the Law of Moses.

The obvious answer to Paul's question was "Not by works at all. By faith."

Rom 10:17 *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

The contrast he calls them to look at is stark. On the one side there's doing (works.) On the other side there's hearing and believing (hearing of faith.)

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the trinity. He lives in the life of every person who has trusted Christ as Savior.

In this age there's no such thing as a Christian who doesn't have the Holy Spirit. A believer doesn't have to wait for some "second blessing" to have the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

If you've trusted Christ as Savior the Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in your life. The issue for us isn't to figure out how to get more of the Holy Spirit. It's how can the Holy Spirit get more control of us.

Here's Paul's point. It's totally illogical that we think we begin our Christian life

by faith but then complete it by works. If you begin in the Spirit, how can you be made perfect by the flesh?

That's foolishness. There's our word again. That's without perception. The noun form, means with out a mind.

Paul is saying "Use your brains guys."

People will say things like: "Sure your saved by faith in the finished work of Christ. But if you don't live right after your saved you'll loose that salvation."

Well, we should all live in a way that pleases God. The Holy Sprit's job in our life. But our right living doesn't have any more to do with keeping our salvation than it did with earning it in the first place.

No works can get us saved, no works can keep us saved. It's either all of faith or it's not faith at all.

If a person could loose God's forgiveness by not living right, then we'd have to say they began in the Spirit but they're made perfect by the flesh.

That's foolishness. It's illogical. Not human logic but Scriptural logic.

Jim Jones started out preaching and teaching from the Bible. He assembled a large following of over 900 members in Indianapolis IN during the 1950's. He preached a message of human freedom, equality, and love, and did a lot of ministry to the poor. Later on, Jones' message became explicitly socialistic, or communistic.

Eventually Jones arranged for himself to be the apostolic leader. No one was allowed to question his authority and his decisions. He abused drugs and people. There were no Bibles found in Jonestown.

By that time Jim Jones had decided that the Bible was untrue. He led the people in singing hymns in which he had substituted his own name for the name of Jesus.

That's certainly radical. That's extreme. But it's also illogical. People left what knowledge they had of the truth to follow a lie.

The Bible is the Source of Objective Truth. All anyone would have had to do was just read it and they would have seen how Jim Jones was in rebellion against God.

I honestly believe that the reason that cults and false religions are so prevalent in our day is because very few people know how to evaluate and think through what they hear and read.

Think about this. Before the 1800's there was no Jehovah's Witnesses, no Mormons, no 7th Day Adventists, no Christian Science, no Unification Church (Rev. Moon), no Scientology. We could put hundreds of others on that list.

Not only that, but you'll never meet anyone who ever adopted the belief system of any of those groups by simply reading the Bible. No one picks up the Bible and comes to the conclusion that their a Mormon, or a Jehovah's Witness.

They're always taught by someone else. All of that very logically says, "There's a problem." But people throw logic and systematic study of the objective truth of the Bible out and slowly buy into these false teachings.

We need to make sure that we're not foolish.

Now, before Paul closes with the testimony of Abraham he has two more quick questions.

Read 4

The word translated "suffered" can mean "physical discomfort" or it can simply mean "experienced."

I'm not sure historically that the Galatians had had to face any physical suffering for their faith so I would go with the idea of "experienced."

We could translate this, "Haven't you learned anything at all from your salvation experience?"

Read 5

We don't have time to turn there this morning, but this afternoon take a look at Acts chapter 14. There you'll find Paul and Barnabas in Galatia and The Holy Spirit does miracles through Paul.

In II Corinthians 12 we're told that miracles were the identifying mark of an apostle.

Acts 14:3 "Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

So Paul asks the Galatians, "Was that due to faith or works? We were preaching faith, so it had to be faith, right?"

- I. Satan Is The Author Of All False Religion*
- II. The Bible Is The Objective Source Of Truth*
- III. God's Way Of Salvation Has Always Been By Faith Alone*

Read vs 6

The false teachers were trying to convince these Galatians that they had to come to God through the works of the Law of Moses so Paul goes back even before Moses to Abraham.

Abraham is the man God chooses to be the source of the Jewish people. The Jews were Abrahams descendents.

How was Abraham saved? How did he obtain forgiveness for his sins? Just like everyone before and after the cross, by faith.

Even Abraham who was circumcised as a sign of God's covenant was accepted by God on the basis of his faith.

Therefore, Read 7-9

To the Jews, the whole division of Jew and Gentile was a big thing. It was "us" who are God's people and "them" who are not.

But God made a great promise to Abraham. this is where everybody else who isn't Jewish gets in on the blessing.

God said to Abraham, *"In you all the nations shall be blessed."*

Through Abraham came the Jewish nation and through the Jewish nation came a Jew named Yeshua. Jesus of Nazareth. Through Abraham the world was blessed with a Savior.

Abraham was blessed because he was the father of Judaism. Abraham was blessed because his sins were forgiven by God through faith.

How do we spot false teaching? It takes a careful, logical, reading of the Bible. It takes using our minds to see the Scriptures that God has logically laid out for us to read and know.

How do we approach someone who is being drawn into false teaching? We need to take our cue from Paul. There needs to be a prayerful challenge for them to base their belief system on a rational, intelligent reading of the Bible.

Satan is the great deceiver. His sole purpose is to steal, and kill, and destroy.

What's the focal point of his attack? The message of the Gospel. The clarity of the truth of faith.