

# THE PROOF OF A BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE GALATIANS 03:01–05

## ***DIVISION OVERVIEW: Justification: Faith vs. Works (Gal 03:01–04:07)***

This passage begins the major teaching of the Book of Galatians, that a man is justified by faith alone and not by good works nor by law. Of course, a man should be good and do good, be as good as he can be and do as much good as he can. A man should live a moral and just life like the law says. But this is not the point; this is not what Scripture is saying. Scripture is saying that a person is *not justified* before God by doing good and keeping the law. No man can do enough good nor keep enough laws to become perfect and acceptable before God. God is perfect, and no matter how much good we do and how much law we keep, we do not become perfect. We are still short: we still fail, sin, age and die. Good works and law do not perfect us; they do not make us acceptable to God, nor impart to us eternal life. Only God Himself can perfect us, accept us, and give us eternal life. Any thinking and honest person knows that there is nothing — absolutely nothing — on earth that can keep us from coming short and dying. There is absolutely nothing on earth that can give us eternal life in a perfect world where there is nothing but love, joy and peace. If we are to ever inherit eternal life, then God has to give it to us. (See notes, *Justification*, Gal. 2:15-16; *Faith vs. Works*, Gal. 2:16; note, Gal. 2:19-21.)

The point is this: How do we know that God will justify us? How do we know that God will accept us and give us life with Him forever? The answer to this question is the discussion of the present passage. There are six proofs that God will justify us by faith alone, six proofs that God will not justify us by works and law.

1. The proof of a believer's experience (3:1-5).
2. The proof of Scripture (3:6-14).
3. The proof of God's Covenant or promise (3:15-18).
4. The proof of the law's powerlessness (3:19-22).
5. The proof of what faith does for us (3:23-29).
6. The proof of Christ and the fullness of time (4:1-7).

## ***Introduction (Galatians 03:01–05)***

Some influential people had joined the churches of Galatia and the churches took pride in their presence. The new members were so capable and the churches were so glad to have them that they were immediately placed in positions of leadership and teaching.

However, these new members had not been truly converted by Christ or else their understanding of the gospel was all confused. They began to teach that faith alone was not enough to save a person, that a person had to undergo the basic ritual of religion (circumcision) and focus his life upon the law in order to become acceptable to God.

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Paul's answer is direct: the *experience* of the Galatian believers disproves that a person becomes acceptable to God by law. The *believer's experience* proves that he is justified by faith alone, and all a believer has to do is to rethink his experience and he will see the truth.

- I. A believer corrects error (false teaching) (v. 1).
- II. A believer receives the Spirit by faith, not by observing the law (v. 2).
- III. A believer grows by faith (v. 3).
- IV. A believer suffers by faith (v. 4).
- V. A believer experiences God's miraculous working by faith and not by observing the law (v. 5).

### **I. Galatians 03:01 Deception**

A believer corrects error. There are four reasons why he must do so.

1. Error makes a person "foolish." Note that Paul calls the Galatian believers "foolish Galatians." The word *foolish* (*anoetoi*) means misunderstanding, thoughtless and unthinking. The Galatians were listening to false teaching and passively accepting it. They were not thinking through what was being taught. They were not applying their minds to see if what was being taught was true or not. They were *foolish*, acting like senseless people who were incapable of thinking.
2. Error deceives a person. The word "bewitched" means to fascinate, cast a spell upon, mislead, deceive. The false teachers were, as so many are, very capable, fluent and persuasive speakers with dynamic personalities and charisma. Their teaching sounded reasonable and logical.

⇒ A man must keep the ritual of religion.

⇒ A man must do good works to be good.

⇒ A man must keep the law in order to be acceptable to God

It all sounded reasonable and logical, especially to a person who was not thinking and comparing the teaching to the gospel of Christ. The error was *bewitching*, deceiving the believers.

3. Error shows disobedience. The Galatians simply were not obeying the truth. They were trying to become acceptable to God...
  - by undergoing the ritual of religion (circumcision, baptism, etc.) instead of trusting the death of Jesus Christ.
  - by subjecting themselves and focusing their lives upon the law instead of Christ.
4. Error leads a believer away from Christ. This is tragic, for the true believer is a person who has seen Christ crucified for him. The Galatians had clearly seen the death of Christ through the preaching of Paul. Paul's preaching had plainly pointed out and explained the death of Christ. In fact, the Lord's death had been so clearly explained

that it was as though the Lord Jesus had been crucified in their presence, before their very eyes. There was, therefore, no excuse for their following false teachers. They knew what Christ had done for them, that Christ had died for them and had taken their sins upon Himself and borne their punishment for them.

They knew that God loved them, that God loved the world...

- that He had sent His Son into the world to die *for them*.
- that God expected all men to believe in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- that God took their faith and love in His dear Son and accepted them because they believed and loved His Son.

How then could they be so foolish and bewitched and not obey the truth — especially when they had clearly seen and understood the death of Jesus Christ?

## II. *Galatians 03:02 Receiving the Holy Spirit*

A believer receives the Holy Spirit by faith, not by observing the law. Note that this whole passage is a series of questions. Paul is stirring the Galatians to think. The present question strikes at the very heart of the gospel: How did you begin your Christian life? Did you receive the Holy Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

There is one thing genuine believers know, and the genuine believers in the Galatian churches knew it too: no person earns, wins or merits the Spirit of God. Man is too polluted and too short of God's glory to deserve the Spirit of God. His thoughts and behaviour are too often...

- ugly           • lustful       • selfish       • undisciplined
- greedy       • impure       • unjust       • unrighteous
- negative     • imperfect   • immoral     • unholy

No matter how much good and how much of the law is kept, the believer knows that he did not and cannot eliminate such thoughts and behaviour — not fully, not perfectly. Therefore, he did not become a Christian — he did not receive the Holy Spirit — by good believing what you hear — faith. He became a Christian and received the Spirit of God by hearing about faith in Christ. He heard the glorious news that Christ had died for him and his sins, and he believed the news. Therefore, God took his faith and counted it for righteousness. The believer knows that he is not righteous, but God *counts him righteous* because he *believes and loves* His Son. The believer knows that the Holy Spirit does not dwell in him because of any goodness or work of his own; he knows that he has the Holy Spirit because God counts his *faith in Christ* as reason enough to put His Spirit into his heart. That is how the believer receives the Spirit of God, and that is how the Galatians received the Spirit of God.

**Thought 1.** Every person must hear the glorious message of faith. “Believing what you hear:” — faith is the only way a person can ever become acceptable to God.

A person must hear and believe the *report of faith*. The *message of faith* is the gospel of salvation — *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His death for our sins*.

**Rom 10:14-17** *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

**Thought 2.** The Holy Spirit is the gift of God. No man can earn, win or merit the Spirit of God. God's Holy Spirit is given by God and by God alone.

**John 14:16-17** *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”*

**Rom 8:9** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

**1 Cor 6:19-20** *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

**1 John 2:27** *As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

### III. **Galatians 03:03 Growth of a Believer**

A believer grows and will be perfected only by faith and not by his human effort. Again, note the question: “After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

A believer does not become spiritually mature by focusing upon his flesh, upon what he can do...

- his efforts
- his works
- his goodness
- his discipline
- his morality
- his just behaviour

No matter how strong and disciplined his flesh is — no matter how many good deeds and laws he is able to do on his own — the believer's effort does not make him grow spiritually. Focusing upon his flesh and upon his own strength and work only causes the believer to concentrate upon himself. It emphasizes self, not the Spirit — the human and physical, not the spiritual and heavenly.

Note another fact: no matter how many good works are done and no matter how many laws are kept, they cannot make a man perfect; they cannot impart eternal life to a man. There is no man upon earth that is living eternally because of works. There is no law whatsoever that can keep a man alive forever and ever. No matter how many works of the law a man has done *in his flesh*, he has not achieved perfection — not the holy perfection that makes him acceptable to God. If he is ever to be perfect enough to be acceptable to a Holy God, it will be because God perfects him, not because he has worked and become perfect through his corruptible flesh and human efforts.

As Paul says, “Are you so foolish?” Is God so low that corruptible and dying man can achieve so much? Is man so exalted that he has so little to achieve in order to be perfected? Any thinking and honest heart knows not.

=> A man *begins* his journey to God when he truly believes in Jesus Christ and is “born again” — a *spiritual thing*.

=> A man *continues* his journey as he is daily renewed by the Holy Spirit — also a *spiritual thing*.

The only way a believer can spiritually grow and mature is to focus his life and mind upon Jesus Christ. The believer must focus his mind upon the things of Christ moment by moment, and as he does, the Spirit of God will draw his mind to spiritual things. Remember: the Spirit of God lives *within* the believer. He is there to work within the believer and to help him grow and mature in Christ.

=> The believer keeps his mind and thoughts upon Christ, casting down arguments and making every thought obedient to Christ.

**2 Cor 10:5** *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

**Phil 4:8** *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

=> The believer focuses and keeps his mind and thoughts upon being conformed more and more to the image of Christ. He keeps his mind and thoughts upon Christ all day long — praising, honouring, worshipping and asking for His help and guidance. He learns to live and move and have his being in Christ.

**Rom 8:29** *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brothers.*

**2 Cor 3:18** *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

**Col 3:10** *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

**1 Tim 4:15** *Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.*

**2 Pet 3:18** *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

=> The believer who focuses his love, attention and life upon the Lord Jesus Christ is accepted by God. God loves His Son so much that He accepts any person who truly loves and focuses his life upon His Son. And someday — in the glorious day of redemption — God will perfect the believer and conform him perfectly to the image of Christ.

**Phil 3:20-21** *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

**1 John 3:2** *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

#### **IV. Galatians 03:04 Suffering for Christ**

A believer suffers by faith. When the Galatians accepted Christ, they had suffered ridicule, abuse, isolation and persecution from their neighbours; and apparently the persecution had continued for some time (Acts 14:1-7, 19, 22). The point is this: if the Galatians now turned away from Christ to some false teaching, then the suffering they had borne for Christ would be in vain. They would have suffered for nothing. In fact, they would now appear foolish if they turned away from Christ when they had suffered so much in order to embrace Him.

**Thought 1.** Every believer who truly turns to Christ has some suffering to bear. It may be mild, but some suffering is borne. There are the sufferings of...

- separating from the world.
- denying self.
- taking up the cross — dying to one's own will and way every day.
- giving everything that one has to Christ and His cause (money, time, energy, effort).

The list could go on and on, but the point is clearly seen. If Christ is worth suffering for, why then forsake Him and turn to some false teaching?

**Mat 5:11** *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

**Mat 19:29** *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”*

**Mat 10:22** *“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

**Luke 9:23-25** *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”*

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

## V. **Galatians 03:05** *God's Miracles*

A believer experiences God's miraculous working by faith and not by observing the law. What were the miracles experienced by the Galatians? They were miraculous works of healing (see Acts 14:8-15). But note: the miracles were not due to the Galatians; they were due to God. The Galatians did not earn, win or merit the miracles. They simply *heard about faith*, the power of faith, and they believed that God would count their faith as the miracle and meet their need. And God did — God worked miracles among them because they believed what they heard. They heard the glorious message of faith in Christ, and they believed in the power of faith in Christ; therefore, God honoured their faith and met their need.

**Thought 1.** What a lesson for us! To believe “what we hear” — the glorious message of *faith in Christ and its power* — and then to experience that power.

**Mat 21:22** *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

**Luke 11:19** *“Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.”*

**John 3:16** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (The miracle of regeneration.)*

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (The miracle of living eternally.)*

**John 15:7** *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

**Eph 3:20** *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

**Psa 91:15** *He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.*

**Isa 65:24** *Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. ■*