



# Spiritual Character

Part 010 - Living by the Gospel - Rejecting Self Reliance.

## *INTRODUCTION*

Most Christians clearly understand that our justification before God is by faith alone. Last time we really delved into what that means and how we do nothing to earn our salvation.

But what does that doctrine mean in our lives from that point on? What should the Gospel mean to those who received it long ago? How does the Gospel effect long term Christians on a day by day basis. Does it have a day to day effect?

Many Christians are confused on these points.

Many consider concepts related to salvation such as justification by faith to be of little value once one has been a Christian for many years.

They may even be tempted to replace these very important teachings in ways that exalt rule keeping and self-reliance.

## *I. DISTRACTIONS FROM THE GOSPEL*

The church in Galatia:

**(GAL 4:15)**

What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

**(GAL 5:15).**

But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

**(GAL 1:6-7)**

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

**(GAL 4:11)**

I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain

**(GAL. 3:1,3)**

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

### **QUESTIONS**

- **HOW HAD THE GALATIAN BELIEVERS FALLEN AWAY FROM THE GOSPEL?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER LOST YOUR SENSE OF JOY IN CHRIST? IF SO, WHY?**
- **HAVE YOU EVER STARTED TO PUT THE FOCUS ON THE LAW AND THE RULES RATHER THAN CHRIST?**

## *II. THE DANGERS OF SELF RELIANCE*

Like the Galatians, we can be drawn away from Christ and the cross. It can happen so very easily. Our lives often reflect a lack of dependence on Christ coupled with an underestimation of the power of sin.

**GAL 5:4**

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Example of wrongly thinking that we can handle sin in our own strength:

A man may think that he can entertain lustful desires in his heart. "After all," he tells himself, "desires do not dictate behaviour." He convinces himself that lust is a minor offence that he can afford... unlike adultery, a sin he would never commit.

He believes that he has mastered the sin within him, but the reality is that entertaining a sin, any sin, separates him from closeness with God.

**IN MATTHEW 5:28, JESUS CLEARLY STATES,**

"But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Sin is a deadly disease.

### *III. THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL IN PERSONAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH*

It is through our failure to live the Christian life in our own strength that we discover our weakness and the importance of walking by faith in Christ.

Several times in Galatians 3:2-5, Paul uses the preposition "by" to express the means through which something is obtained.

**GALATIANS 3:2-5**

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith

**Example:**

During the Protestant Reformation, Luther and Erasmus were debating about what best portrays our salvation and our need for grace.

Erasmus admitted that sin had made man sick, but he went on to say that our need for grace is more like a young toddler who is learning to walk. A person is able to take some steps to God, but sometimes he also needs His heavenly Father to catch him and help him along.

Luther was repulsed by such a little need for grace and told Erasmus that he was most assuredly wrong.

He said that our salvation is more like a caterpillar that is completely surrounded by a ring of fire. Unless someone reaches down and rescues the caterpillar, it will certainly perish.

**QUESTIONS:**

**IN WHAT WAYS DO WE OR OTHERS TRY AND ADD TO THE FINISHED WORK OF THE CROSS AFTER WE HAVE RECEIVED SALVATION?**

## *IV. THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL IN MINISTRY*

Reasons for ministry success or failure are numerous. But because of the way that God loves us and because of the nature of the Gospel, success in ministry depends more on God's power than on our performance.

As an example, let's compare two days in your life:

*One Saturday you get up and go to a prayer meeting as is your custom. On the way out of the house, you have a brief but pleasant conversation with your neighbour.*

*You go on to have a wonderful day in which God's presence is obvious in many ways. On the way home, you have an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone, and so you share Christ and His salvation with him.*

*The next Saturday is quite a bit different. You wake up late, miss the prayer meeting, and speak unkindly to your neighbour on your way out.*

*In general, the day is filled with confusion and God does not seem to be near. You begin to feel badly about what you have done, but to your surprise, you have another opportunity to share the Gospel with someone.*

The question is, would you pass by the opportunity because you feel like you are unworthy to share the Gospel with this person?

Do you think that it is possible for God to bless you on a bad day?

If not, then why not?

**QUESTIONS:**

**HOW DO YOU LET YOUR WORST DAYS EFFECT YOU? WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT THE WAY WE VIEW GOD'S GRACE?**

## *V. LEARNING TO ROOT OUR FAITH IN CHRIST*

God's solution to our inability to please Him in our own strength is not that we try harder. That way only leads to either frustration and despair or pride and self reliance.

His solution is that we believe more strongly the truths of the Gospel. By believing these truths, we begin to root our lives in Christ.

Example:

On August 21, 1544, Martin Luther wrote to one of his faithful and trusted friends, George Spalatin.

Spalatin had given some advice that he later came to regard as sinful. When he reached this conclusion, he was immersed in grief and guilt. He was convinced that he should have known better and that he, of all people, should not have made this mistake.

He could not be consoled.

When Luther learned of his condition, he wrote to offer him comfort, saying,

*"... my faithful request and admonition is that you join our company and associate with us, who are real, great, and hard-boiled sinners. You must not by any means*

*make Christ to seem paltry and trifling to us, as though He could be our Helper only when we want to be rid of imaginary, nominal, and childish sins. No! No! That would not be good for us. He must rather be a Saviour and Redeemer for real, great, grievous, and damnable transgressions and iniquities, yea, and from the greatest and most shocking sins; to be brief, from all sins added together in a grand total...*

We cannot add to what Christ has done for us.

As one man has said, "Anything we add to Christ's work pollutes it. It becomes like the smell of a skunk at a beautiful sunset. It is a nice scene, but you just don't want to be there."

**Like we said last time - Christ + Anything = Nothing.**

#### **QUESTIONS**

- **HOW DOES THE GOSPEL APPLY TO US AS BELIEVERS?**
- **WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-EFFORT AND FAITH?**
- **HOW DOES LIVING BY FAITH IMPACT OUR DAILY THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS IN LIFE?**