

Has anyone ever challenged you with the simple phrase: “Start the way you mean to finish”?

- Starting a new job, a new school year, a new degree, a new relationship, a new project at work, a new church plant, etc. It means to do things at the beginning the way you intend to do them at the end. If you start well, you will finish well. Have you ever seen someone start something extremely well only to head down hill fast?

This past week we were able to have Seth and Michelle in our home for a post-marital followup (btw, didn't they do a great job leading worship) and they're doing awesome. But haven't you seen couples that started off so well only to fall further and further apart as the years went on. Why? They stopped doing the things that they did when they first started! They use to be friends and now they're enemies. They used to treat each other with so much love and compassion and now they can't even say one nice word about the other. You, being on the outside looking in, how did you feel? What did you want to say to them? “Do the things that you once did when you started!”

That describes Paul's concern for the church at Galatia. He's writing to this church that he personally saw start so well and yet now is at the brink of disaster. In this passage today he's saying, “Finish the way that you started!” This is what explains the harshness of his language (“Oh foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Are you so foolish?”).

In Galatians 3:1-9, Paul moves from appealing to his own personal career with the gospel to their experience of conversion and the testimony of Scripture in the OT. His goal is to defend the thesis that Tanner laid out for us last week in Galatians 2:16 that a person is justified not by works but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Transition: Today we're going to see that it's not only important that you *start* well but that you also *finish* well. Here is how you should start...

I. Initially Receive the Spirit by Faith (3:1-2).

- Paul interrogates them with a series of rhetorical questions; the first: “Who has bewitched you?”
 - The Galatians had come under the spell of the false teachers by turning from faith to a reliance on works so he reminds them of their initial conversion experience.

1. They heard the preaching of Christ crucified (3:1).

- Paul's proclamation of the gospel was so vivid for the Galatians that it was as if they had been eyewitnesses of the crucifixion. Not only that, Paul couldn't understand how anyone who truly understood the gospel of Christ crucified could ever get caught up in legalism. It points us back to Paul's argument in 2:21: why did Jesus have to die?
 - Jesus, the perfect man, deserving of eternal life, took my sin, my death, and my condemnation. The cross points to how completely hopeless and lost we are. The cross kills my pride but magnifies the love of God.
 - The cross also points to how completely sufficient the atonement of Christ for our sin is. The cross is the dawn of hope. Jesus gave himself for me (2:20).
- He's saying, “How could you ever forget the picture and meaning of Christ crucified?”
- The Galatians' actions are so foolish because their relying on works contradicts the work of Christ on the cross.

2. They believed the preaching of Christ crucified (3:2).

- How did you initially receive the Spirit? How were you saved? How were you justified?
- Works of the law: relying on your observance of God's commands
- Hearing with faith (believing what you heard - NIV): hearing the Word of God, the message of the gospel of Christ, and believing.

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:14-17).

- I did not work for my salvation. I just received it through faith. God is the one who works. He works salvation through the provision of his Son.

3. As a result, they received the Spirit of Christ (3:2).

- This is the first reference to the Spirit in Galatians.
- Paul is reminding them, “You didn’t receive the Spirit because you were circumcised, kept the Sabbath, or performed any works for God. You received the Spirit because God worked for you. All you did was hear the Word of God and believe.

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13; cf. Acts 2:37b-38).

- Theological Implications: If you have responded to the gospel with repentance and faith, you have received the Spirit. If you are a Christian, you have the Spirit. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” (Romans 8:9, ESV)
- The main point: Your actions are so foolish because your own experience of receiving the Spirit when you believed the gospel should teach you that salvation is not by works of the law but by grace. Your current actions contradict the work of the Spirit in your lives.
- Transition: this leads us to our second truth. It’s not only important that you start the Christian life through faith, but that you keep going in the Christian life through faith.

II. Daily Live in the Spirit by Faith (3:3-5).

- Paul’s concern here moves from how they initially received the Spirit and began the Christian life to how they’re trying to “be perfected” and live the Christian life. The Galatians, who had started so well when they first heard and responded to the gospel with faith. were in danger of trying to live the Christian life in a way that nullifies the grace of God and leads to destruction. “Did you suffer so many things in vain...?” (3:4).
- **Question:** After becoming a Christian through faith in Christ, how are you supposed to grow to maturity in Christ? How does the Spirit of God continue its work in your life today? How are you sanctified? How do you grow in godliness? Do you move on past believing and faith and the cross to greater things like obedience to the law and rules and regulations?
- **Answer:** God sanctifies you the same way that he justifies you...by hearing with faith (3:5). The same way that you entered the Christian life is the same way that you live the Christian life.
- How does my “hearing with faith” and the work of the Spirit result in sanctification?
 - **God’s Role:** Sanctification is a work of God by his Spirit. The Spirit grants power so that I’m freed to do God’s will. “God was the Workman in our justification, and He will be the Workman in our sanctification” (Piper, *Desiring God*, 172; see Phil. 2:13-14).
 - **Your Role:** As the Spirit powerfully works inwardly, you hear and believe.
- The Spirit and the Word in my justification.
 - My ears heard the Word say I’m a sinner and by the Spirit I responded with faith.
 - My ears heard the Word say that Christ died for my sin and by the Spirit I responded with faith.
 - My ears heard the Word say repent and believe and I will be saved and by the Spirit I responded with faith and was saved.

- The Spirit and the Word in my sanctification.
 - The primary battle of the Christian life is won and lost in the MIND

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your **mind**...” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:20-24; Col. 3:1-2).*

*“For those who live according to the flesh set their **minds** on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their **minds** on the things of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:5 ESV; cf. 8:13).*

- The Spirit works powerfully in and through believers to renew their minds as they set their minds on the things of the Spirit... And, the things of the Spirit relate to the things found in the Spirit inspired Word of God (Eph. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:21).
- We talk a lot here at RHC about the Word. Read it, hear it, sing it, pray it, meditate on it, memorize it, teach it, and so on. You’ve got to get this. You must combine all of these with faith. If you don’t believe what you read, hear, meditate on, and memorize, it will not transform your life. The Spirit works powerfully not just when we hear the Word but when we combine our hearing with believing.
- Every temptation you face to sin is an opportunity for you to set your mind on the Word of God and believe it over and against the lies of sin, Satan, and the world. When you do this, the Spirit powerfully works in you to kill sin and pursue holiness (Ps. 119:9-11; Josh. 1:8). Faith is the only response to God’s word that makes room for the Spirit to work. “Faith, making the soul poor, empty, helpless, destitute in itself, engages the heart, will, and power of Jesus Christ for assistance” (John Owen, *Of Temptation*).

“Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:8-10).

- The essential mark of a Christian is not how far you have progressed in sanctification but “on what you are relying on to get there” (Piper). The way that you entered the Christian life (hearing with faith) is the same way you daily live the Christian life (hearing with faith).
- Transition: Not only does their experience defend the thesis of justification by faith, so does Scripture. Paul now turns to the ultimate source of authority in all matters related to God and his revelation to us. The argument from 3:6 until the end of chapter 4 is a battle for the Bible.

III. Know that Salvation has always been by Faith (3:6-7, 9).

- “Just as” = “Take Abraham as an example...”

“And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:4-6)

- Why does Paul so often use Abraham as an example? Abraham was justified...
 - Before he was circumcised (Gen. 17), the sign of the covenant.
 - Before he offered up Isaac (Gen. 21), the ultimate display of his faith.
 - Before the giving of the Law (Ex. 20).
- Paul was putting forth the Abraham of faith alone over against the Abraham of the rabbinic exegesis who was blessed by God because of his meritorious deeds. The OT example of Abraham teaches us that it is through genuine faith, and not from the law, that one is counted righteous.

“In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness.’” (Romans 4:18-22)

- Just as the Galatians had trusted God’s Word, which they heard through Paul’s preaching, Abraham believed what God said and was counted righteous. Abraham’s faith wasn’t specifically faith in Jesus Christ, but in God and his promise. Abraham’s faith was, for Paul, qualitatively like that called for in the Christian gospel.
- Implications:
 - 3:7: If Abraham was not justified because of his circumcision but by his faith, then the true children of Abraham are not those of physical descent and circumcision, but those of spiritual descent, those who rely on faith in Christ.
 - 3:9: You inherit the blessing of Abraham by becoming like Abraham, the man of faith.

IV. Know that Salvation has always been for the Nations (3:8).

- Scripture personified: How can an inanimate object “foresee” anything? It was God himself who spoke to Abraham the words attributed to Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16).
- What did Scripture foresee? That the good news of salvation would be extended to all peoples, including the Gentiles. The specific Scripture is Gen. 12:3.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” (Genesis 12:1-3)

- God’s plan from the very beginning has always been for global worship.
 - Blessing on Adam and Eve: Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth.
 - The promise of an offspring in Gen. 3:15 to Eve, the mother of all the living.
 - Abraham’s blessing comes to the nations through Christ, the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).
 - Anyone can inherit the blessing of Abraham (Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, white or black or brown, slow or smart, old or young). When you place your faith in Christ, you inherit the blessing of Abraham.
- You can’t embrace the blessing of Abraham without having a heart for the nations. Matthew, who calls Jesus the son of Abraham in Matt. 1:1, ends his Gospel with the Great Commission of Jesus to his disciples saying, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations.” The promise of Genesis 12:3 comes true as the church makes disciples of all the nations.
- Our mission at RHC is see the unreached in Greater Boston transformed by the gospel and turned into global Christians (see RHC Discipleship Strategy), global Christians who are committed to seeing disciples made from Greater Boston to the World. “We want to measure success not by our seating capacity but by our sending capacity” (J. D. Greear).
- The **first** step is to respond to the gospel.
 - Have you responded with repentance and faith? Do you need to be baptized?
- The **second** step is to prioritize the rhythms of grace through dependent discipline, to daily live in the Spirit by faith.
 - The Rhythm of the Word and Prayer
 - The Rhythm of Community (community group, church membership)
 - The Rhythm of Stewardship (time, talents, treasure)

- The **third** step is to begin making disciples in Greater Boston.
 - Know, Identify, Pray, Display, Invite, Declare, Disciple (Movement Card)
 - Do you need someone to show you how to make a disciple? Seek out a discipling relationship.
- The **final** step is to begin making disciples among the nations.
 - Pray
 - Take the lead in your CG to serve your missionary.
 - Give (sacrifice some things).
 - Over 20% of every dollar you give goes toward missions.
 - Once a year we do a special Great Commission Offering where 100% goes to missions.
 - Go (save up some vacation time).
 - Trip to Toronto
 - Trip to India
 - Generation LINK (Summer, Residency)

What is the next step that God wants you to take today to move towards becoming a mature Christian impacting the nations with the gospel? (CONNECT CARD)