

Galatians 3:3 (ESV) "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

**1. Introduction.** There is a sickness associated with work - a consequence of rejection, with the need to be accepted. It is a sickness of compulsion, sometimes addiction, believing whatever we do is never enough, to be acceptable. This is something from which we need to be healed, because it is overwhelmingly self-centred, one-off from being Jesus-centred, and His saving work. "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."<sup>1</sup>

What we do flows from our relationship with God through Christ, from our heart's desire to be obedient to the Father - as Jesus was. But that is not always true. Often it comes from ingrained attitudes, desires, motives, wants, to be loved because of what we do. We become shackled to activity, rather than operating in freedom, in Christ - whom to serve is perfect freedom!

God's in Creation gives life. We, made in God's image, were created to be life-givers.

Jesus, the spoken Word of life, fleshed out, renewed, energised, made connections - born again, afresh, anew, gives life. We are confirmed, renewed - God's life-giving children.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to enter into the resurrection-life of Jesus, maintains the connection with Jesus - alive in hearts, minds and spirits. We are those who are fully alive, living in healing-freedom, cleansed of self-pity, given emotional, and spiritual energy, power and passion.

Life, freedom, in Christ, is our gift. However, something subtle can creep upon us - work can take over relationship. We can become more interested in ideas, in task, even in mission, ministry, than in God Himself. We distance ourselves from the alive-God, even though everything we do is done in His name, and, we add, to His glory!

Could this be what Jesus was on about when He said: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father..."<sup>2</sup>

We become disconnected from this vital relationship with the alive-God, from adoring, worshipping-obedience to the will of the Father. "Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

Like the Scribes and Pharisees we Christians can be overtaken by a spirit of religiosity which drives and compels. There is a sense of not being good enough, of the need to strive to live out the Christian life in such a way that we think we are compelled to please God - but cannot believe we make it. (Story of Gertrude)

Have you ever screamed out in anger to God, like Gertrude? What are we saying when we do that? Is this a sickness that some of us have that needs healing?

**2. Striving to be Loved.** Many grow up with the belief that we have to perform, achieve, be a winner, to be accepted, to be acknowledged and to be loved - remember those school reports!

We respond accordingly, looking for pats on the back, words of affection, really demanding words of encouragement, openly seeking them, for our efforts and performances. They may be given but - as Gertrude's husband found out she did not receive them - there wasn't, couldn't be, enough! Most of us, whether we are aware of it or not, do things with wanting the approval of some audience or other, but for some there is never enough.

Be careful here, ask questions. Why am I doing this? What am I trying to prove, to others, to myself? Is it a deception? Am I responding with motives that focus on "my needs", for love and acceptance, or God's will?

We need to encourage one another, but when we actively seek it, demand it, never get enough of it, and will not accept it, we are in dangerous territory. "Take care...lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."<sup>3</sup>

Recognise - this drive to prove ourselves can be disastrous leading to depression, abusive behaviour, unless there is healing, a healing into humility, into a right relationship with our Father.

Disciples of Jesus don't need to perform. We have an audience that matters - the audience of one - God our Father who loves us, accepts us, for who we are. "Having begun by the Spirit..."

How does this all come about? It goes back to two factors:

- we were born centred on ourselves, which, in some, perhaps many instances, was not helped in
- our upbringing - feeling unwanted, unappreciated, with a lack of affection in the home, where love was often conditional, an imbalance between loving care and discipline, not accepted for who we are - we felt we needed to perform, behave, toe the line, excel - "you can do better than that"!

There may be truth in such stuff, or there may not - it may only be the way we interpret the messages we received - but the reality of it is very real.

We need to succeed to prove a point, want compliments not criticism - become defensive, overbusy, tend to blame others, get angry, ministers to, but cannot accept ministry, tries to control people, is lonely. Is that enough?

Much damaging stuff flows from this which can lead into real sickness, demanding healing.

- **Handling it leading to Healing.** God, in Christ, is life-giver, healer. Therefore we have hope, even though healing can be slow, because of the attitudes and patterns to be overcome. If this sort of stuff applies to you, then:
  - seek the guiding Holy Spirit to show you your true motives as a child of God.
  - recognise this is a healing of the “self” - we need to change. “Abhor what is evil; holdfast to what is good.”<sup>4</sup> It is only when we hate a particular behaviour in ourselves that we will want to change it, hence:
  - recognise our need to confess wrong motives, repent of false decisions, and take hold of God’s forgiveness.
  - recognise that this will please the Father’s heart.”<sup>5</sup> As it was said of Nineveh, so it can be said of us: “There is no easing your hurt; your wound is grievous. All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?”<sup>6</sup> Joy, laughter, lightness of touch in newfound freedom.
  - put this behaviour to death, a dying to self. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”<sup>7</sup>
  - “if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”<sup>8</sup>
  - make new decisions concerning our motives - all I want to do is to please Almighty God - the audience of one.
  - Freedom will come; “I will give you rest.”

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:28 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:21 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 3:12 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:9 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> Luke 15:7a (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Nahum 3:19 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 1:21 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:13 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 5:1 (ESV)