

Nothing but the Blood (Part 3)

Galatians 1:11-24

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We began this sermon series with the illustration of being in a car, maneuvering the vehicle so that it stays in its lane and does not swerve into the adjacent lanes. We referred to this as, “course correction.” Paul course corrects the Galatian Christians in this letter because of the influence of false teachers in their midst who tried to convince them that the only way to please God is to believe in Jesus AND follow the Law. Paul emphatically tells them this is not the case! If anyone preaches a gospel contrary to the gospel that he preached to them, a gospel of grace through faith in Jesus alone, that other message is no gospel at all. Like the Galatians, Paul reminds us that our focus, our purpose, and our mission should be to know and love Jesus more and more. And when we make that our focus, the result is genuine transformation.

Paul speaks in this section about his own transformation through the work of the gospel, and emphasizes to his readers that his understanding of the gospel was not through the influence of people, but was revealed to him by God Himself. He says several times in this section how the apostles had nothing to do with his understanding of the gospel (vv. 12, 17-19). Why would this be so important for him to mention? Bible scholars surmise that Paul’s reputation was under attack by the false teachers in Galatia that somehow he was inferior to the other apostles and that his message was therefore inferior. So, in order to establish his own credibility, he reminds them that his understand was not from the apostles, but directly from God. However, in a general sense, we can all say that our understanding of the gospel is from God, despite the fact that we may have learned it from a sermon, a Sunday school lesson, or a Bible study. We know that the transformation is from God because it is God who opened up our eyes so that we might see the true light of the gospel in the first place (2 Cor. 4:4). Without the ministry of God, even an airtight presentation of the gospel falls on deaf ears. But through the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the unbeliever, eyes are opened wide to see the truth and beauty of the gospel message. We don’t come to God because we were searching for truth, or because we are just smarter than the unbelieving world. We came to God because He searched us out and found us, delivered us from this world, and brought us to Him.

When the gospel takes a hold of us, the resultant change is transformation. Paul speaks of his own transformation in this section and reminds the Galatian Christians of what they

already know about his former manner of life. He was a persecutor of the church, and even worked to end the faith (vv. 13, 23-24). He reminds them of this because, as it turns out, his own change is proof positive that the gospel IS at work in the world and DOES change lives. How do we know that we are saved? Because we grow and change, albeit slowly sometimes. That transformation has a two-fold origin. On the one hand, it is done TO us by the Lord, and in that sense, He is the agent and we are the recipient. This was Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. On the other hand, we also know that we cannot sit idly by and expect that we change without any exertion or effort on our part. We DO have a part to play in the process because although God does the prompting, we also have to respond. He may convict us of sin and impress upon us areas that we need to grow, but we can certainly resist His influence (and thus not grow) or respond in faith (and draw near to Him). So, the transformation Paul speaks of, the kind that he had and that we ought to have, is both a work of God and a work of our own. Are you not growing? Ask yourself, are you resisting His leading? Are you putting forth effort in your spiritual life? Are you surrendering yourself to His will? If the answer is "No" to these, perhaps this explains why you are not experiencing the joy of the Christian life as we should be.

Finally, Paul reminds them of his own transformation not only because it's evidence to himself that he is saved, but it authenticates his message to them. That is what happens when we grow in our spiritual lives. Not only do we experience the confirmation that we children of God, it is also confirmation to those we speak to that God is the Creator God and Jesus is His Son. When people hear from our mouths that Jesus is the only way to salvation, if they see no difference in our lives from theirs, what reason do they have to believe that our message is real? If, however, we have been changed by the Lord, that becomes undeniable evidence to our listeners that something has happened to us. Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that his own transformation proves that his message of the true gospel is real.

The gospel needs to take root in our hearts and influence our lives. The resurrection power is available to us, for growth, peace, and hope, but only when we also do our part and seek after it. And when we do, when we are changed, those that hear our message can see the proof positive that the God of the Bible is the only God, and His Son Jesus, is our Savior and King.