

Nothing but the Blood (Part 5)

Galatians 2:11-21

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As we learned a few weeks ago, Galatians is about course correcting by refocusing on Jesus as our sole purpose and motivation. It's easy for churches to become misdirected towards other causes like social justice, fighting poverty, or stopping human trafficking. While these are good causes, they are not what motivates us and not what unites us. Good works such as these are merely expressions of being transformed by true knowledge of Jesus. He is the purpose of church. When we have faith in Jesus, our lives are transformed by Him. True faith causes transformation, which results in action. When Jesus called Peter to walk on water, Peter's faith in Jesus resulted in him actually stepping out of the boat and walking. The action is evidence of the faith. When I told my son that he didn't have to be afraid to go upstairs because Jesus was more powerful than any monsters, his faith gave him the courage to walk up the stairs, while announcing out loud the whole way up, "God is with me, God is with me!" Knowledge of Jesus is transformative. If you believe in Jesus, if you have entrusted your whole being to Him and depend solely on Him, it should change you.

Recall that Paul is writing to the Galatians to bring them back to the true gospel (vv. 5, 14). They had lost their way because of false teachers. Christianity started with Jews, whose lives revolved around the Law. They knew Jesus was the only way to have their sins forgiven, but they were still confused about the role of the Law. One source of this confusion was the false teaching that Jewish Christians were still bound to the Law that made them special and unique. Another source was the false teaching that Gentiles had to follow the Law as well in order to be accepted as God's people. Those who taught this failed to remember that God was the one who reached down to us through Jesus, because nobody could possibly reach God by following the Law. Finally, at the other extreme, some other false teachers taught that being forgiven by Jesus meant they could do whatever they wanted. What they didn't understand was that faith in Jesus directly leads to transformation. Though we are dead to the Law, we are alive in Christ. We live not for ourselves, but for Jesus, because His life is in us.

In today's passage we learn that Peter was not immune to this confusion. Peter, like Paul, was raised to think Gentiles were unclean barbarians. It took a while, but finally he began to accept Gentiles and even dined with them (v. 12), because he realized the Gentiles and the Jews

who had faith in Jesus shared in the same salvation by grace. However, once some of his Jewish brethren began to pressure him, he became embarrassed and began to separate himself from Gentiles again. And Paul rebuked Peter for this. He had started backsliding into the behavior dictated by his culture instead of living according to the truth of the gospel. Paul insisted that Peter couldn't go back, and that he must go forward because faith in Jesus leads to transformation. Jesus breaks the barriers, constraints, and traditions of culture.

Just as Peter had to do, we also must cast aside those aspects of our culture that are contrary to the gospel. Chinese culture comes with a lot of practices that are contrary to our faith. Have we cast aside those figurines or wall decorations that supposedly bring good luck? Have we cast aside superstitions about the meaning of our zodiac animal or the number of whorls on our fingerprints? If we have faith, Jesus transforms us. We must realize that we are Christian first, and Chinese-American second. Our identity is in Christ, and our allegiance is to Him first.

In vv. 19-20 Paul says that he died to the Law. He was united with Jesus in His death. On the cross, Paul's old life, his Jewish heritage and Pharisaical training, died with Jesus. And at the resurrection, Paul gained the life of Christ in him. Jesus' life takes over our life, and transforms us. The practices of Chinese culture, with its roots in ancestor worship, Buddhism, and superstition, must die in us. Even Western traditions that are against the gospel, like that of Santa Claus, must be cast aside. We shouldn't be teaching that Santa will reward good behavior and punish bad behavior, but rather that we are all naughty but God still gives us all the free gift of salvation. We must be transformed by the life of Jesus. If His life is in us, it should change how we see the world, the way we live, and how treat and accept others.