

## **Nothing but the Blood (Part 6)**

Galatians 3:1-14

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Every so often we receive a shock that makes us realize what is important and re-center our lives. Paul tells us in Galatians 2:5, 14 that the truth of the gospel should be our focus. But does it influence the way you act in school, work, or at home? Does the gospel affect us, or do we need a jolting experience to remind us again?

In Galatians 3:1-6 Paul asserts that the truth of the gospel is applicable not just when we first believed and when Jesus returns in the future, but also in the present, while we are waiting. The truth of the gospel works in us now. Salvation theology (soteriology) divides salvation into three processes. The first, which occurs at the moment of conversion, is justification, which involves being forgiven and cleansed of sins, being made alive in Christ, being born again into a new life in Christ, and having our inner man (our spirit) renewed. Most of us would agree that justification is something that Jesus did for us for free, and that we could not achieve this miraculous transformation through our own effort. The last step in salvation is called glorification, which is the resurrection of the body, when Jesus returns to renew our outer man. When we are glorified, there will be no more pain, sickness, and decay. We will no longer have to struggle with the corrupt desires of our broken flesh. Most also can agree that this transformation is something that we cannot achieve on our own. We must have faith in Jesus and He will do the work of renewal in us.

But between justification and glorification is sanctification, whereby we are gradually made more like Jesus. During this process, we grow in the Lord and our inner man struggles with the outer man to overcome sin in our lives. It's easier to think that sanctification is achieved by trying to be more godly and resist temptation. But just like justification and glorification, sanctification is also by faith. It is something that God does for us for free, not something that we do for ourselves. In life there are many transformations that we must put in effort to attain, like becoming healthier, which takes diet and exercise. It's too easy to judge those who are unhealthy and blame them for not exercising. But spiritual transformation is not like that. Don't be tempted to think that your spiritual growth is due to your own diligence and devotion, or that others are less spiritually mature because they haven't put in the effort. It is only by God working in us through the resurrection power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit that we can become more like Christ.

Recall that after accepting the true gospel from Paul, agitators told the Galatians that they had to follow the Law in order to maintain their relationship with God. Paul rebukes the Galatians for so quickly straying from the truth and thinking that after justification by faith they can be sanctified by works. By grace through faith we start the race at justification and end at glorification, when obtain a crown of righteousness. But while we are running we also persevere and move forward by grace through faith. We have not persevered because we are so disciplined and godly. It is only because the life of Jesus flows through us that we can endure.

When we run the race we struggle with the damage of our flesh, and each of us is damaged in different ways. Sometimes this damage is encoded into our bodies naturally and sometimes it is acquired through experiences. Many women naturally struggle with gossip more than most men, and most men naturally struggle with lust more than many women. Many of us struggle with sins caused by how we were brought up or even by childhood abuse. Our sinfulness is a function of the damage we have accumulated. Some damage can be mended, but much of the damage is something we will just have to struggle and cope with for the rest of our lives. We see from Romans 8:20-23 that all of creation is damaged and is waiting for renewal. But we would be foolish to think we can fix the damage by being more disciplined. Only God can repair us.

Finally, in Galatians 3:2 and 5 we see two similar sentences that tell us the Spirit is received by faith rather than through obedience to the Law. However, v. 2 is in the past tense, referring to justification; and v. 5 is in the present, referring to ongoing sanctification. The Spirit is at work within us now. Just as we humbly trusted in Jesus when we first accepted the gospel, so we must humbly trust in Him every day, for only His power can sanctify us. Philippians 1:6 also states that God sanctifies us through His work, not our effort. Stop trying to do it yourself, but rather, submit to the Lord who does the work in you.