

Nothing but the Blood (Part 16)

Galatians 5:1-6

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Even though my parents died before my children were born, I want to instill in my sons a sense of closeness to their grandparents. In a similar way we should also be experiencing closeness to Jesus, even though we haven't seen Him face to face. Sometimes amidst the routine of church we may grow dull. Jesus may seem more distant to us. But we must not forget that He broke the chains that bound us in slavery to a system of works and to sin in order to be connected to Him instead. Don't let your love and commitment to Jesus grow cold, for you are now joined with Him.

In Galatians 5:1-6, Paul reminds the Galatians that they are no longer bound to the Law but rather are bound to Jesus. The connection to the Law has been exchanged for a connection with Jesus. In v. 1 Paul says that it is for freedom that Jesus set them free. It seems redundant, but he is trying to emphasize that the Galatians are now free. They have not been set free just to be bound once again to the Law, which is what they were in danger of doing. The burdensome yoke of slavery has been lifted. There is no need to put it on again. Paul warns the Galatians against burdening themselves after Jesus lifted their burden.

Paul focuses on circumcision in vv. 2-6 because it is the final and heaviest burden the Law imposes. The Law has over 600 commands, so it is evident that the agitators in Galatia did not impose all these commands at once, but rather they did so gradually. They would introduce the rules that were easy or seemed to be of some obvious benefit first, like dietary restrictions. Gradually they would add more commands until they reached the most difficult one, which was circumcision. It was difficult because for the Galatians it would have to be undertaken as an adult, without anesthesia, in a public way. It was painful and of no obvious physical benefit. And it was irreversible. It was the final initiation into Judaism. Paul says in v. 2 that if the Galatians take this final step, they will be divorcing themselves from Jesus and binding themselves to the entire Law.

Why would the Galatians be so tempted to do such a foolish thing? Sometimes a system of works can be attractive and can draw people in deeper. Just look at the message of the Mormons. They emphasize family closeness to get people interested in Mormonism. Then they slowly introduce more rules to follow until people are bound in slavery to the system of works-

based righteousness. For us, we may not be so easily enticed into following a legalistic set of rules, but we can also be easily bound to a system that is contrary to the gospel, thereby distancing ourselves from Jesus, to whom we should be bound. Those of us who are immigrants or have been trained in Chinese customs by our parents may have a hard time being free from traditional superstitions. Would we choose a house with an address of 8888 over one with an address of 4444? Do we put weight on our zodiac animal or intentionally look for auspicious days to have our wedding? When Cindy was having some issues during pregnancy we were even told that because the first character of Zachary's Chinese name had a mouth character inside that he was being bitten in the womb. We must let go of these superstitions. Do not be enslaved by them.

Jesus took off the yoke of slavery in order to place His yoke upon us. We are disconnected from a system of works to be connected to Him, not just to do whatever we want. Yet in Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. We do not obey out of obligation or fear, but because we are connected to Him, and He is good for us. His transformative life and righteousness is in us.

In v. 5 Paul says we eagerly await the righteousness for which we hope. The phrase "eagerly await" only appears a few times in the New Testament, in Romans 8:19-25, 1 Corinthians 1:7, Philippians 3:20, and Hebrews 9:27-28. All these passages are referring to Jesus' return. He is who we are eagerly awaiting. Yes, we wait for the redemption of our bodies, the renewal of creation, and being able to see our loved ones in heaven. But these are fringe benefits. Whom we mainly wait for is Jesus Christ.

So finally in v. 6 Paul reaffirms that the Law has no hold on those who are connected with Jesus. Through faith we are bound to Jesus and free from the Law. We do not obey out of obligation, but rather because Jesus' love is working in us and overflowing from us. Jesus is the One we are bound to, and He is the One we wait for.