

## **Nothing but the Blood (Part 17)**

Galatians 5:7-12

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In golf it isn't that easy to putt straight because the slope and curvature of the green as well as little pock marks in the grass cause it to veer off the intended trajectory. Similarly when we drive, imperfections in the road (lane markers, pebbles, bumps in the asphalt) cause us to constantly make small course corrections with the steering wheel in order to stay in one's lane. Likewise, in the Christian life our goal is to head towards Jesus, but we are constantly nudged left and right as we experience the world which make us veer from this course. Without course correction we could go completely astray. It's tempting to think that the Christian life is easy and that after being saved we can just go on autopilot. But if we are not careful we can easily be led astray. We must constantly be nudged back on course.

In Galatians 5:7 Paul says that the Galatians were running a good race but were nudged off course. The Christian life is a race. It's not a sprint, but rather it's a marathon. In my youth I would experience spiritual highs (e.g. during retreats) and lows. But I noticed that Uncle George from my church had a spiritual life that was not characterized by extreme oscillations, but rather it was slow and steady growth. This race is long and we must not be so easily tossed back and forth. Rather, we must persevere. We must be in it for the long haul. We must fix our eyes on Jesus and be firmly rooted in His teaching.

Paul mentions that in this race the Galatians were cut off by these agitators. They caused the Galatians to veer off course. Paul asks them how they could let these agitators so easily lead them astray. In v. 9 he compares the agitator's false teaching to yeast spreading through the dough. If you've ever made bread using a starter, you know that you only need to save a little bit of dough from the last batch to leaven the entire next batch. A little bit of starter goes a long way. It spreads and affects the entire batch of dough. Likewise false teaching can spread through the church and cause damage throughout. It's like poison. It can cause the whole church to go astray. We too must be wary of teaching that leads us away from Jesus. It need not be heresy to be damaging. In our fellowship groups when we put too much focus on anything that isn't Jesus we are in danger of going astray. We are at church to learn about Jesus, not necessarily to learn how to parent, manage our finances, manage our time, or be physically healthier. These are not bad things, but they can be nudges that take us off course. These things are not what our community

is about. We are united by Jesus alone and we must be diligent and faithful to teach and learn the word of God to keep us on track.

Someone recently asked me how they know their faith is true. Of course true faith must be put in Jesus Christ. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He became a man, that He died and rose again to save us from our sins, that He gives us new life, and that He will return to renew all things. But beyond the content of our faith, true faith must persevere until the end. Those who fall away, who go astray and never return, demonstrate that perhaps their faith is less than real faith. We who are in the faith must persevere in faith. We must keep believing until the end. Whenever we veer off course, we must be nudged back on course.

Three times in this passage (vv. 7-8, 10) Paul uses the word *peitho*, which, although translated as “obeying the truth”, “persuasion”, and “confident,” has the connotation of being nudged. Paul prompts those who are going astray to be nudged back on course, to be redirected. So what is it that nudges us back on course? It’s the opposite of what nudges us off course. If false teaching leads us astray, then true teaching brings us back. Teaching and learning Scripture is one of the primary goals of church. Those who are teachers must help keep people on track. They must turn people’s minds toward Jesus.

Finally in vv. 10-12 Paul graphically expresses the depth of his disappointment at how the Galatians were being led astray. He states that those who have been spreading false teaching (those who preached circumcision and obedience to the Law) will pay the penalty. Let this be a warning to all those who teach. Just as it says in James 3:1, those who teach will be judged more strictly. I don’t know what this means exactly, but those of us who teach must be cautious because we can either lead many to Jesus or lead many astray. And all of us must constantly encourage each other to remain in the faith, because the further anyone strays the harder it is to come back. So let us nudge each other back on track through teaching about our Savior.