

Nothing but the Blood (Part 22)

Galatians 2:20

Pastor Edward Cheng

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Today we are wrapping up our series on Galatians by reviewing some of the key points of this letter. Recall that Paul founded the church in Galatia and gave them a foundation in the true gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus. When Paul handed over the reins to the Galatians, false teachers arose and began teaching that obedience to the Law (including circumcision) was required for salvation. Paul's letter to the Galatians was meant to combat this false teaching, and you can see his frustration and disappointment in the Galatians for being so easily led astray.

In this epistle, there are three take-home points. First is that we must be completely committed to Christ. This emphasis is seen in Galatians 1:3-4, 6, 10, 12 and 2:11-16, 20. Faith in Jesus is what saves us and what keeps us growing. We cannot overemphasize the importance of Jesus. But how often do you utter the name of Jesus? Saying you believe in God isn't the same as saying you believe in Jesus. Muslims believe in Allah, but they see Jesus as merely a prophet. Jehovah's witnesses likewise believe in God the Father, but see Jesus as only a man, not God. They therefore are not our brothers in the faith. The thing that distinguishes us is that we believe in Jesus, God incarnate. The importance of Jesus' identity is highlighted in Matthew 16:13-16. Also Philippians 2:5-11 further explains why our focus should be on Jesus. Jesus humbled Himself to death on the cross in order to save us, and so God exalted Jesus above all else. Likewise we should exalt and praise the name of Jesus. He is fundamental to our faith, and He must be our focus as we share our faith. God doesn't feel slighted when we focus on Jesus. Philippians 2:11 says that exalting Jesus actually glorifies the Father. It is through the Son that we can see the Father, and through glorifying the Son we glorify the Father. The Spirit works in the background, and He doesn't get as much attention. But He doesn't mind, because when we glorify Jesus, the Spirit is also glorified as is the Father. Romans 10:8-13 again pushes us to have a singular commitment to the name of Jesus. We should be obsessed with Jesus, and we should teach our children, our friends, and our colleagues about Him. He is the focus of our lives, and we cannot abandon Him as the Galatians did.

The second point is that we should have a complete commitment to faith in Jesus rather than works. This is seen in Galatians 3:2-3, 5, 7, 22, 24 and 4:4-7, 5:6. We are saved through faith. We trust in Jesus to save us, not in ourselves. There is nothing we can do to earn salvation.

But why is it so tempting for the Galatians to go back to a works based system? The first reason is that they had an over-inflated view of themselves. If you don't realize how sinful you really are, it's tempting to think you can reach God's standard. But the damage in all of us is extensive. Romans 12:3 warns us against thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. But we all struggle with this pride. For me it comes out as a feeling of being under-appreciated. Most of us have these occasional feelings that we are so good that we deserve more than we have now. We think we deserve a higher grade, a raise, or a promotion. We think it's unfair when others have more than we do. We need to be humbled to realize that we don't deserve anything good from God. We are so terribly broken that only God can fix us. We can never reach His standard of righteousness. But the other reason the Galatians try to earn salvation is that they underestimate God. He is nothing like us, and we can never become like Him on our own. God's perfect holiness is emphasized in Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:26, and 21:8. Just to be able to start approaching God's holiness required adherence to so many rules, as laid out in Leviticus. But that isn't nearly enough to bring us even close to His level. God's standard is perfection, not just on the outside but also in the heart. We must realize that we cannot even come close to reaching this standard. The only way we can become righteous is to let God make us righteous through faith in Jesus.

Finally, we must have complete commitment to change. This emphasis is seen in Galatians 5:13, 16, 19-24 and 6:8. If we believe in Jesus, it must have some effect. If we trust Jesus to change us, He will do it. If we have not changed, it is because we have not allowed Jesus to change us. Transformation is the result of true faith. The deeds of the flesh in 5:19-21 are all focused on satisfying one's self. These are the hallmarks of those who don't have faith in Jesus. But those who have been transformed exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23), which are focused on others rather than on one's self. This transformation should play out right here, in our relationships with each other. Let us ask God to continually change us and encourage each other to grow in faith as we live our lives centered on Jesus.