

Galatians

One of my favorite bible characters is Paul. Somehow I can relate to him. Paul was a passionate person who always called it like he saw it. Paul was a zealous Jew and was, in his own words, “more” of a Jew than most Jews (Philippians 3). Paul was so much a Jew that he felt compelled to destroy Christianity. This seems crazy, but remember that Jews were to be set apart and in the old testament often went to war killing all that opposed the Jews. Paul was zealous about his faith and believed he was doing God’s will for his life. Most likely that is why Jesus had to do drastic things to get his attention. Paul was blinded and in his blindness met Jesus who corrected this zealous man’s path towards his new calling, spreading the good news about Jesus, the long awaited Messiah.

So, when Paul hears that some in Galatia are trying to persuade the Christians to be more Jewish, he becomes outraged. Paul goes on to explain that he confronted Cephas (Peter) about the issue. Peter was being two faced in his treatment of the Gentiles. Acting one way when no other Jews were around and another when his Jewish friends showed up. Paul goes on to condemn those who expect the Gentiles to be given the burden of Judaism and forced to follow the law (circumcision).

Paul then explains that in Christ we are saved through faith in Christ and not in obeying the law. He connects the old to the new by showing that all of Abraham’s children inherit salvation through Christ. Furthermore, all people who have faith in Christ share in the inheritance of Abraham’s blessing. God sent his son for us. All of us. Jesus has set us free.

So what should we do with this freedom? Apparently some of the Galatians were using their freedom in Christ to justify their sins. Paul explains that living in faith leads to good living. Paul calls this good living the “fruits of the Spirit”. Living in faith leads to good things like “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”. Some of the Galatians were doing the opposite. Living in “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like”. Again, Paul calls it like he sees it. Even when it is harsh.

Finally, Paul goes on to say that strong Christians, those walking in the faith, should work to gently help those that are not walking in faith. Those not producing good works. Paul ends with one final clarity - good works (following the law) won’t save you. Faith in Christ does that. Fruits of the Spirit are simply the natural byproduct of faith in Christ. True followers of Christ want to do good things. Not because it leads to salvation, but because they are free in Christ and truly understand what that means.

S David Price (the elder with the red shoes)