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FAITH OR WORKS

The Apostle Paul, when he was known as Saul, was very zealous about tracking down Christians and either destroying their homes or killing them. He was a Pharisee, a legalist that went by the letter of the law. He thought he was doing these works for God, to get rid of this heretical “cult” but when he met Jesus on the Road to Damascus everything changed. He was confronted with his “works” and was found guilty. Jesus said in modern English, “How does it feel to get poked with a stick like you gave it out?” He was given a taste of his own medicine so to speak.

After he spent three years on the back side of the desert studying scripture and communing with Holy Spirit. There he learned about faith. There he learned that the “just” must live by faith, and not by works. He learned that works are the result of our faith, but works do not justify or make us more acceptable to God.

The biggest problem Paul had in his ministry was with people that were like he once was. He would preach truth about faith, but they were bound up in legalism that they had been taught from childhood. These legalistic Jewish leaders tried to force newly converted gentile Christians to be circumcised and do other works of the law that they deemed necessary to be saved.

In the Book of Galatians Paul called these gentile Christians “foolish” for going “backwards.” They had started out in the Spirit, but they succumbed to the legalistic views of these Jews. The whole letter of Galatians was to correct that wrong view. He showed them that Abraham was not justified by works, but rather by faith. Works follow faith. Faith produces good works, but works will never save anyone.

Are you bound up in the thought that if you are just good enough that God will love you? That is a works doctrine, not faith. None of us will ever be good enough. We have to accept the truth that Jesus brings salvation to us by faith in his “works” that he alone could do, through his crucifixion and resurrection. These alone provide the way to eternal life. Once we are free of this works’ legalism, we rest in the fact that God loves us. It takes faith to believe this, but it is the only way to rest entirely on what Jesus did, and not what we can do to get saved, or stay saved!

Remember works (things we do for God’s kingdom) come after salvation, but do not provide salvation.