

Sunday Lesson – May 16, 2021

GOSPEL: Galatians 3: 1 – 9, 23 - 29

One in Christ

Background

“Galatians was written because the churches of that region were facing a theological crisis. The essential truth of justification by faith rather than by human works was being denied by the Judaizers—legalistic Jews who insisted that Christians must keep the Mosaic Law. In particular, the Judaizers insisted on circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who wished to be saved. In other words, convert to Judaism *first*, and then you are eligible to become a Christian. When Paul learned that this heresy was being taught to the Galatian churches, he composed an epistle to emphasize our liberty in Christ and to counter the perversion of the gospel that the Judaizers promoted.” (Excerpts from gotquestions.org/Book-of-Galatians.html)

Insight

“Galatians 3:26-28 gives us insight into the phrase “in Christ” and what it means. Paul is speaking to the Christians in Galatia, reminding them of their new identity since they placed their faith in Jesus Christ. To be “baptized into Christ” means that they were identified with Christ, having left their old sinful lives and fully embracing the new life in Christ (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). When we respond to the Holy Spirit’s drawing, He “baptizes” us into the family of God. 1 Corinthians 12-13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” ” (Excerpts from gotquestions.org/in-Christ.html)

Gospel Reading

“You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a spell on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has



happened, for it’s obvious that you no longer have the crucified Jesus in clear focus in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough. Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God’s Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren’t smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it? Did you go through this whole painful learning process for nothing? It is not yet a total loss, but it certainly will be if you keep this up! Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving *or* because you trust him to do them in you? Don’t these things happen among you just as they happened with Abraham? He believed God, and that act of belief was turned into a life that was right with God. Is it not obvious to you that persons who put their trust in Christ (not persons who put their trust in the law!) are like Abraham: children of faith? It was all laid out beforehand in Scripture that God would set things right with non-Jews by *faith*. Scripture anticipated this in the promise to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed in you.” So those now who live by faith are blessed along with Abraham, who lived by faith—this is no new doctrine! And that means that anyone who tries to live by his own effort, independent of God, is doomed to failure.

23-29 Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for. But now you

have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ’s life, the fulfillment of God’s original promise. In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ’s family, then you are Abraham’s famous “descendant,” heirs according to the covenant promises.” *The Message*

What It Could Mean?

“If both Judaism and the Christian gospel are founded on the grace and faithfulness of God, what, then, was the purpose of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What new and necessary aspects did Jesus contribute to the already amazing grace of God? In Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29, Paul answers this question concisely: What God began by his Spirit in Genesis, God completes by his Spirit in Christ. What Israel was in part, Jesus is in full; and it is through this completion brought by Christ that our identities are completely reconfigured around our participation in his life and his Body, the Church.

Galatians 3 begins by focusing on the ministry of the Spirit in the new covenant. Central to the Epistle to the Galatians is the reality that the Spirit is the divine agent who expands and completes the old covenant in and through Christ.

The point is that the Law—the Torah—could never perfect us because it was never meant to serve that purpose. The Law was meant to guard us, to guide us, and to point us to the one who would make us whole, Jesus Christ. The climax of the Torah in the person of Christ, marked by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, had been prophesied throughout the Scriptures (both Old and New). The Spirit was spoken of as the one who would accompany and empower believers in the new age in which the law would be written upon their hearts (see for example,

Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-28). This is the faith which both marks us out as a badge of belonging and unites us as an instrument to the one whose faithfulness alone secures our salvation, Jesus Christ.

The Law kept us from being completely adrift in the chaotic catastrophe of sin and death. It held us “in custody” (NRSV “imprisoned”) and guarded us (Galatians 5:23), but it could never complete us because the Law itself was longing for its own completion in Christ.

Our identity is no longer informed and governed by the characteristics of our individual selves in separation from one another. Rather, we are transformed as persons in communion with one another, and we are guided by the characteristics of the Christ in whom we have been clothed (Galatians 3:27).

In a season of great national and global division, it is the call of the Church to live out this radical charter of unity in Christ through our union with Christ. Let us cling to Christ and to one another by faith, lest we co-opt another story and clothe it with our own personally constructed, custom-made Jesus costume in his place.” (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org by John Frederick*)

Readings for Further Study

- [1 Peter 5:14/Philippians 1:1/Romans 8:1/Colossians 3:3](#) *Believers “in Christ”*
- [2 Corinthians 5:17-21](#) *Exchanged our sins for His perfect account*

Thought for the Day

“Its in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for” ~ *Ephesians 1:11 The Message*

A Prayer

Lord of justification, with great joy we receive the gift of salvation which is ours not because of our own efforts, but because of the saving work of Christ. Grant us full access to the glory of your salvation, an abundance that is more than enough for all humankind, for the sake of our redeeming Christ. **Amen.**