

Sermon Title: “**Galatians: Identity**”

Sermon Series: Galatians: Sons and Heirs in Christ

Text: **Galatians 1-2**

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Introduction- The Occasion for the Letter

A few weeks back we experienced the Jerusalem Council addressing the question of Circumcision and the role the Old Testament Law and Traditions would have on followers of Jesus after His Ascension. It is an understatement to say that Jesus changed everything. Rather, Jesus fulfilled everything, and it is faith in Him and His work that justifies us.

Justification.

This is the theme of the Letter Paul writes to the Believers in the Galatia region that had become churches during his First Missionary Journey. However, not everyone was happy with the Jerusalem Council’s decision and without the modern means of communication afforded us today, Judaizers worked quickly to continue pressing Gentile believers to convert to Judaism through circumcision.

The Spirit inspires Paul to pen this letter which can circulate faster than Paul can physically travel. We will be looking at the following themes over the next few weeks before returning to the Book of Acts:

Week 1 Our *Identity* in Christ Chapters 1-2

Week 2 Our *Justification* through Christ (Part 1) Chapters 3-4

Week 3 Our *Justification* through Christ (Part 2) Chapters 3-4

Week 4 Our *Freedom* in Christ Chapters 5-6

What role has this letter played in believers then and now?

The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine.

-Martin Luther

It was Luther’s study of the New Testament in Greek, in particular Paul’s letter to the Galatians, that led him to discover a truth long buried the better of a thousand years under Roman Catholic teaching of salvation by works. Galatians celebrates something quite the contrary- salvation by grace through faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. ***Justification.***

Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation

because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers.

-Merrill C. Tenney

I. There is only one Gospel (Galatians 1:1-9)

- Vv. 1-5

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- Paul is up against those accusing him falsely; perhaps those of his sect of Pharisee, meaning to set oneself apart. In refutation of that Paul affirms:
 - His *specific* appointment by God to Apostleship
 - His (and our) *shared* appointment by God to salvation
 - If the credibility of Paul as an Apostle falls short, then his message falls short, and any point can be taken or left. However, if he is appointed by God his message is God's message for then and now. In a sense, our New Testament is in question on this principle.
- **Delivered** (Gk. *exaireo*) by Jesus. Jesus was God's rescue mission for Humanity. This must be groundwork understanding of the pre-eminence His Person and Work must have in our lives and witness.
 - Consider Jesus' own witness in **John 3:16-21**. We are all condemned because of sin.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. 21 But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

- Consider Jesus' affirmation of our need to repent **Luke 13:1-5** Whether human evil or natural catastrophe, all stems from the curse of humanities fallenness.

There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

- Present evil **age** (Gk. *aion*) here is not referring to a period of time, but a way or system of life that is passing away. IOW the Kingdoms of this world, darkness, Satan are passing as God’s Kingdom is present and growing. Paul is building on the existing platform among the Roman Gentiles; the idea that Rome is bringing peace to the world.

*In comparing the Roman Empire with what went on before, **Aristides** uses the metaphor of illness and healing, ‘it can be said in medical terms that the inhabited world was, as it were, ill at the start and has now recovered.’ Even further he states, ‘Before the rule of Zeus was established, everything was filled with faction, uproar and disorder, but when Zeus came to rule, the Titans were banished to the deepest corners of the earth, and everything was put in order. Likewise with the Roman Empire, before, there was confusion and factionalism; after, there entered in universal order and glorious light.’*

-Terence L. Donaldson, Gentile Christian Identity from Cornelius to Constantine

- Vv. 6-9

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

- Paul is **amazed** (Gk *thaumazo*)- utterly dumbfounded as if were we listening to the same message? Were we even in the same room?!
- So **quickly** (Gk *tacheos*)- easily and fast.
- **Turning** (Gk *matatithemi*) A military term meaning desertion; AWOL. They were not being forced but were removing themselves from the work of Grace.
- Who is Paul talking about perpetrating another Gospel?
 - Judaizers. Jewish and non-Jewish followers of Jesus who believed that the Levitical (ceremonial) portions of the Law were still binding on believers, including circumcision.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. -Romans 11:6



- Their goal was maturity. However, growing and maturing in Christ to *earn* God's love (**Law**) rather than *because* we are loved of God (**Grace**) are two completely different platforms.
- **Distorting** (Gk metastrepho) meaning turning something into its opposite; *doppelganger*. Example: Superman / Bizarro

- Let them be **accursed (x2) False teaching** can spring from a loving as well as a hating heart. We must measure all things by God's Word (revelation) and submit to it alone as truth. *God takes this seriously; therefore, we can do no less.*

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. 18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book -[Revelation 22:17-18](#)

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. -[Titus 2:10-11](#)

Why does this matter? If we are serving Jesus to earn His love we will fall short, stumble and fail. In our failure we may even give up / quite. Stop going to church, reading the Bible, praying. God doesn't hear us because I'm not good enough. I can't go back because I don't deserve forgiveness. I messed up too bad. Etc

See, Paul is wrestling with this because this is how he used to be. He hurt so many and was destroying his own soul in the process of trying to earn the love of others and God. He had to let go of that to embrace Jesus, and he is laboring for the Galatians and us to do the same!

II. Delivered: The Apostles *Specific Identity in Jesus*

Paul's Calling

1:10-12

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

- Paul goes on to contend that he is not the same person that he was before encountering Jesus. Before, Paul did strive to please his Pharisaical peers. But now, it is only to please He who saved him and called him to be an Apostle. Paul is zealous for Jesus and His Kingdom.

1:15-16

But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;

- It was God who brought Paul into His family and Kingdom. Understanding who saved him, Paul is devoted to His purposes through his surrendered life.

Paul's Message

2:1-5; 9

*Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, **in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.** 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

- Paul is referring to the Jerusalem Council and the result- *unity in the Gospel!* The scrutiny Paul encourages us to put any teaching through he himself submits his own teaching to. Being a teacher of God's Word is not something to be taken lightly, flippantly, or half-heartedly. We must all give an account for how we represent Christ and teach His Word- in this our hearts do well to seek out review and feedback from those with wisdom gained from matured intimacy in Christ.

Paul's Heart

2:11-14

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

- If Paul was truly trying to please others he certainly would have at least ignored Peter's behavior. However, this public display misrepresented the love of God in

the acceptance of Gentiles as part of the family and thus received a public rebuttal by Paul.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. -Galatians 3:28

- How did Peter feel about this and how did he view Paul? He affirms Paul's **calling, message, and heart.**

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen

Why does this matter? Our motives are the direction our efforts move towards. If they are selfish, they will exhibit fruit contrary to that which the Spirit nurtures through Christ in us. How we respond to correction, how we submit to the discipline of learning and growing in the Word along with living our lives to proclaim that Jesus is Lord and Savior all require a death to self. How do our motives measure up to this?

III. Delivered: Our Shared Identity in Christ

2:15-16

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified[a] by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

- Justification by Faith Alone -> *the HEART of the Gospel!*
 - *General:* A person is not justified in and of themselves.
 - *Personal:* We believed in order to be justified through Jesus.
 - *Universal:* No one will be justified outside of Jesus.

2:17-21

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for

me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

- ***Our Calling.*** The Law is the voice of just condemnation toward all of us; by it we are sentenced to death.
- ***Our Message.*** Jesus took upon Himself that sentence, the just for the unjust. The cross, formerly a curse to all who our attached to it, has become a beacon of the truest love that God could both lavish and offer to sinful humanity. By the cross, our old sinful self is gone, and we live in newness of life- resurrected, eternal life in Jesus.
- ***Our Heart.*** Our journey both begins and continues with Jesus by faith alone. We live, learn, and mature ***because we are loved by Him.***

IV. Conclusion & Application

- What we believe about Jesus *matters.* How we teach and represent the Gospel *matters.* How we live for the Jesus who saved us, by whom we have been justified in the eyes of a Holy God by faith alone, *matters.*
- Consider Paul's words in **Romans 6:1-11**

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.