



Galatians 3:26-4:7
 Finding Freedom: Galatians
 Children of God

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This morning we continue the series in Galatians that we've been in since the start of the new year. If you were here last week, there are two things to comment on. First, if you were physically here at church, you were a rare and brave person because of the snow. Second, and more to the point of the message, whether you were here physically or watching online, you heard Paul give a great message that helped us understand a section of verses that can be confusing. Let me re-cap very briefly, because it sets up today's passage. In his sermon, Paul helped us see that there are two covenants being talked about in the middle of chapter 3: the Abrahamic covenant that came first and is built on the faith of Abraham and is valid for anyone else who follows in faith; and then the Mosaic Covenant, also called "the law," that although it came over 400 years later, it didn't replace the Abrahamic covenant. It was put in place by God to aid the Israelites and help them form their own identity as God's holy people. But the law didn't invalidate or replace the original Abrahamic covenant, the promise of God. And so in his message, Paul helped us see that the argument the Apostle Paul is making is that Jesus invites us to step into that Abrahamic covenant and live by faith – faith in Him.

And so, this whole letter has been building up to this point, to this very moment. On the cross, Jesus has done all the works necessary for righteousness and his work there bestows righteousness on us...brings us into a right relationship with God...when we have faith and live by faith in Jesus.

So: What does this mean for the churches in Galatia in regards to their relationships, where they've got men, women, people who have different ethnic backgrounds, different religious backgrounds, different places on the ladder of societal hierarchy...what happens with these differences in light of their common faith in Jesus? The big difference addressed thus far in his letter has been between Jews and Gentiles, but we'll see that Paul expands to include other differences. And I cannot think of a better passage in all of Scripture for our time and place in the world where we have all kinds of diversity and differences as well, and many of them are causing divisions

– within Christianity and certainly within our culture at large. So, let’s dive into this passage, **Galatians 3:26-4:7**. This is God’s Word to you and me today...

The whole letter is summarized in these verses: that all who are “in Christ” – who have put their faith in him, with Baptism being the marker of that faith – all who have their faith in Jesus are included in the family of God. You are “clothed with Christ.” In other words, when God looks at you, he sees Jesus. He sees what Christ has done – on the cross – and not what you have done. This is extraordinarily good news because we cannot do enough. The fact is, we are judged by what we do and have done. And we have “all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” as Paul puts it in Romans 3:23. But Jesus did not sin and does not fall short. He lived the perfect life. And when we have faith in Jesus, God sees him rather than us.

One of my favorite bands the last 5 years or so is a Christian band called Theocracy. When I first learned of this band, they had just released their 4th album, and literally for the next 2 years they were all I listened to as I digested their music on an almost daily basis. They are a progressive power metal band – think “Metallica or Iron Maiden” but with a vocalist who sings like Geoff Tate from Queensryche. Put it together and it means most of you won’t like them. My wife hates their sound...but everything they do is deeply rooted in Scripture.

So they have an incredible 22-minute song that’s like a mini rock opera called, “The Mirror of Souls.” And the song is about a dream that singer and songwriter Matt Smith apparently had; or if it’s not actually autobiographical, it’s written in that style, from his own perspective. Initially, in the dream, he sees himself in some mirrors, and the reflections he sees are how other people see him. Lots of accolades, you’re a great guy, and so forth. This leads to a prideful, arrogant spirit. Then he comes to another mirror in “the hall of truth” where he sees himself as God sees him. Here’s how he puts it when he sees himself in this mirror:

As I slowly start to rise

And face the great mirror in front of me

When I open my eyes, I have to close them again

**But still the image is burned into my mind:
 A face with eyes as black as night
 A terrifying sight
 The flesh rotting away in sickness and decay
 It's mangled by disease
 I'm unable to breathe
 Tell me what manner of creature this could be
 'Cause it's not me**

He goes on to learn that in fact it was himself he saw in the mirror: the sin and brokenness in his life is reflected in the mirror; it's the mirror of his soul, the mirror of who he really is deep inside, not just what the world sees. And as the song progresses he meets a "stranger" (Jesus) who helps him understand what it is he saw, and who can maybe help him be changed. Then the song continues with these lyrics:

**I have seen my soul in the mirror
 And it has broken me
 I have seen myself so much clearer
 Than I had ever seen
 "Can't you take away all this sickness
 From my soul and set me free?
 You can save me, I believe"
 And then he said, "Arise, my child
 Your faith has made you reconciled
 Now gaze into the Mirror once again"
 We walked together through the door
 And I looked in the glass once more
 But the only one reflected back was him
 Somehow the only one the mirror saw was him.¹**

When God looks upon us on judgment day to judge us and gaze into our soul: for those who are clothed in Christ, He will only see Jesus. Nothing else matters. Only Jesus, as we are clothed in him. If you are not clothed in Christ...if you have not put your faith in Jesus, I invite you to do so today.

And to drive home the point that nothing else matters, Paul then addresses head on some of the differences in these churches that have been causing divisions, in a verse that one NT scholar calls “the most socially explosive statement in the New Testament.”² Paul writes, **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28)**. Now, to be sure, Paul is not saying that there aren’t differences between people.

So he’s not advocating for a one nation world; He’ also not dismissing roles in society – though to be sure, slavery as our nation experienced it he would not condone and in his letter to Philemon Paul advocates for setting free a slave name Onesimus; and he’s not saying that gender is irrelevant or fluid or that there aren’t really any differences between men and women. In fact, you notice there’s a slight change when he gets to “male and female” where he uses the conjunction “and” rather than the contrasting formula of “neither *this* nor *that*” of the first two pairings. **This is clearly influenced by the Genesis account of creation and particularly Genesis 1:27 where God makes humankind in his image, “male and female.”** So, Paul is affirming the gender distinctions, and affirming the unity of our humanity and of being made in the image of God, and now *also* the unity Christians have because of our common faith in Jesus.

So, what Paul means is: **When it comes to our standing before God, how God sees us, and therefore *how we ought to see one another and treat one another*: all of that is based solely on Jesus Christ.** This has been the whole point of his letter all along and now he’s naming some of their barriers to unity. Particularly, the Jew and Gentile issue was front and center, as pretty much the whole letter up until now is addressing the dividing wall that’s been erected between them. And this is not the only letter where Paul addresses this issue. For instance, in Ephesians Paul has a significant part of that letter devoted to this same problem of Jews and Gentiles, and he writes, **“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14)**. The dividing wall of hostility...the places in life where our differences break our unity, break our relationships...those walls are broken down by Jesus,

because there is neither “Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

And so he’s saying that: **The differences and distinctions between us that we tend to see as walls of division, all get broken down by Jesus.**

This means that the goal isn’t to draw people to our “side” of the dividing walls that exist in our nation and world, but to break down those walls, with Jesus as the foundation... We want to help others know Jesus as their Savior, as the foundation for their lives. Too often, however, Jesus is used to build walls up, to further divide us as we try to convince everyone that our “side” is right and that Jesus is on our side and not the other side.

There was an article in the Religion section of the Washington Post about a year-and-a-half ago titled, “Jesus Isn’t Interested in America’s Two-Party Politics.” It was written by an Australian Evangelical Christian Theologian named Michael Baird, who happened to be in the U.S. for a time and observed the divisiveness of our political landscape. Here is part of what he wrote:

I understand that everyone wants Jesus on their political side. In fact, I find it heartening that Jesus is still the endorsement that everyone wants! But there are immense costs being paid when politicians and pundits claim Jesus for their own side...

For people who are serious about following Jesus and how to live out their faith in him, it is not a question as to whether Jesus believes in our politics; rather, the real question has to be whether we believe in Jesus and in his kingdom as a challenge to our politics.

In other words, for Christians, the point of contention should not be whether Jesus is more conducive to Republican or Democratic parties, but whether we are prepared to break from the polarization of our politics to engage in a more authentic mode of discipleship...

As a theologian, I can tell you that in Christ, there is neither Republican nor Democrat, Libertarian nor Green, Dixiecrat nor Republicrat, but

we are all one in Christ Jesus. All of us, whether of the red or the blue, of the elephant or the donkey, must discern within the precincts of our own consciences what a follower of Jesus should do about health care, gun violence, the opioid epidemic, foreign policy and immigration. Not naming Jesus as our patron, but faithfully figuring out how to follow him in a context far removed from his own (Michael F. Baird, “*Jesus Isn’t Interested in America’s Two-Party Politics*”).³

And let me just clarify one thing he said: we Christians really should not even be of the elephant or of the donkey, because the one we bow down to is the Lamb who laid his life down on the cross. We are of Jesus. End of story. Now I get it the only candidates and policies likely to succeed are from one party or the other, and as American citizens, you can only vote on the options given you. But the point is that with Jesus as our common foundation, we Christians ought to be leading the way in thoughtful, respectful conversation – not only with other Christians but with non-Christians as well – about the things that divide us, so those things would be *less* divisive, rather than *more* divisive. I hope some of us are inspired to do that because of today’s passage and this message. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” There is arguably no verse in Scripture that is more convicting about the state of our unity than Galatians 3:28.

Ok, let’s finish out the last few verses, where Paul returns to some themes that were in last week’s passage, where he’s talking about heirs, and guardians, and trustees, and so forth. And in a nutshell, he’s saying that: **Once you come to a place of faith in Jesus, your relationship with God is transformed.** You’re no longer a slave to the ways of the world, and you’re no longer an underage heir waiting for a certain point in maturity to inherit everything...so you no longer have a guardian or a trustee overseeing things. That’s kind of what the Law was, that Mosaic covenant: it was a guardian to keep people on the right path for a certain season. But now, through faith in Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family, the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham and his seed – those who would come after him and also live by faith as he did. In other words, through faith in Jesus: you’re a child of God.

And God sends his Spirit into the lives of those who trust in Jesus.

You may recall a couple weeks ago or so we began to see Paul talking more about the Spirit, and I said we'd see that continue, culminating with the fruit of the Spirit in 5:22-23. And here Paul uses the language of the Spirit dwelling in our hearts. It's the Greek word "Kardia" and we get "cardiac" from it. As in, "What does too much division and conflict cause? Cardiac arrest." So, we tend to associate feelings with the heart, such as empathy and understanding others. When the Spirit dwells in our hearts, we are better able to have empathy, which leads to unity. Rather than build up walls, we can – by the Spirit's help – break them down.

So: What are the walls in your life that separate you from others, and how is the Spirit softening your heart so you might help find unity in Jesus with those people? How can you see them as clothed in Christ, as God sees them, and not as the world sees them? And if they *aren't* clothed in Christ, that's not an excuse not to seek unity or not to see them as created in God's image. In fact, it's all the more reason to converse with them in a respectful way and keep Jesus as our foundation rather than just tacking Jesus on to whatever we believe and wielding him like a baseball bat, because that's not going to help lead that people to a place of faith. We want to help people know Jesus just as we do. We need more Spirit-filled heart, and less attack.

And then, within the Christian faith, let's find our unity in Jesus. Whether a person is Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, non-denominational, Catholic, Episcopalian, Foursquare, Assemblies of God...whether it's your boss, your spouse, your parent, your college rival, political rival, a person of another nationality or skin color or at the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum...whoever clings to Jesus as revealed to us in the Bible is our brother and sister in the Lord. We need each other. They are children of God. So let's see one another as God sees us, as reflected in His mirror, clothed in Christ, and let's find unity with Christians under the lordship of Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ "Mirror of Souls" from the album of the same name, by Theocracy. The style of music may not be for you, but check out the lyrics, if you don't want to give it a listen. It's a song with an incredible story rooted in the Gospel.

² Klyne Snodgrass, “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution?”, p. 161 – as quoted at http://www.lionelwindsor.net/bibleresources/bible/new/Philp_Gal3%2728_History_of_Interpretation.pdf

I first heard this quote of his about this verse in seminary.

³ “Jesus Isn’t Interested in America’s Two-Party Politics.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/11/13/jesus-isnt-interested-americas-two-party-division/> - This article by Australian Evangelical Theologian Michael F. Baird may require a subscription. I’m not sure how I accessed it without one (maybe they offer a few free articles per month), but when I went back to it I couldn’t read it any longer. Fortunately, I’d copied and pasted it to a word document, so I still had access to the text.