

Galatians is a pastoral letter of practical theological advice to the churches of the Roman Province of Galatia, what we now call Turkey. There a debate and division had occurred among the Jesus followers over identity: did one have to first identify as a Jew by adopting Jewish rituals (such as circumcision and law obedience) before identifying as a Christian?; or could a Gentile-born Jesus follower simply become Christian? The underlying issue is of freedom, identity, unity and how the Church would live out the teachings of Jesus in a pluralistic world. The letter has served as the genesis of many revolutions of thought and continues to speak to us today.

Spirit versus the **flesh** :: the common contrast in Paul's works between that which is of God and that which is not (or human). Check out Romans 8:1-8

^{“2} For the law of the **Spirit** of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the **flesh**, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful **flesh**, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the **flesh**, ⁴ so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the **flesh** but according to the **Spirit**. ⁵ For those who live according to the **flesh** set their minds on the things of the **flesh**, but those who live according to the **Spirit** set their minds on the things of the **Spirit**. ⁶ To set the mind on the **flesh** is death, but to set the mind on the **Spirit** is life and peace.” Romans 8:2-6

Just as Abraham “believed God” :: In his argumentation Paul cites the story of Abraham from Genesis 15:1-21 (specifically in verse 18). God makes the covenant with Abraham because of the latter's faith, not his circumcision (which is only recounted later in Genesis 17:1-27 in which his circumcision is recounted in verse 23). In rabbinical dialogue the scriptural authority went to the argument, or citation, which came from the earliest part of the Torah. Hence Genesis 15 trumps chapter 17.

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 5.28.2017

Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

The Message

Galatians 3:1-9

¹You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex 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.

²⁻⁴ 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!

⁵⁻⁶ 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.*

⁷⁻⁸ 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.”*

⁹⁻¹⁰ 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. Scripture backs this up: *“Utterly cursed is every person who fails to carry out every detail written in the Book of the law.”*

Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Galatians 3:1-9

¹You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! ²The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? ³Are you so foolish? Having started with the **Spirit**, are you now ending with the **flesh**? ⁴Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. ⁵Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

⁶*Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,”* ⁷so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. ⁸*And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.”* ⁹For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith :: again Paul cites the story of Abraham in Genesis, this time going back to Genesis 12:1-3.

¹“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

THERE IS NO LONGER :: Paul argues for a unity based not on class, tribe or gender, but on family appurtenance. Underneath his affirmation seems to lie the proclamation of Jesus: “³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to Jesus and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” ³⁵ WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD IS MY BROTHER AND SISTER AND MOTHER.””

Galatians 3:1-9, 23-29

The Message

²³⁻²⁴ 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.

²⁵⁻²⁷ 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.

²⁸⁻²⁹ 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.

Galatians 3:23-29

NRSV

²³ Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷ As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

²⁸ THERE IS NO LONGER Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

²⁹ And IF YOU BELONG TO CHRIST, THEN YOU ARE ABRAHAM’S OFFSPRING, HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

***What strikes or shimmers for you in this passage?**

***Last week we heard Galatians 1 & 2 in which Paul begins to wrestle with the debate about identity and integration in the Church for Jesus followers coming from a Jewish, or Gentile, background. He refuses to allow two statutes, or a first and second class existence. He argued that we are free in faith, justified (made holy in God’s image) by faith not what we do or where we come from. It’s this freedom that we both receive in faith and which calls us to faith. Do you experience freedom as the way in which you come to know God’s love and then love others?; or Do you come to trust in God’s love and then discover such participatory and contagious freedom? What does it mean to be free in Christ for you?**

***The underlying question of this section is about unity. Alienation is the opposite of unity. When we feel alienated because of suffering, exclusion or confusion we often respond to others (who are different than us) with calls for conformity or calls for purity. In our Us versus Them thinking the “others” have to become like us in order for us to be unified. But Jesus says something different about family and unity. In our country today we face a similar question of purity, conformity, alienation and calls to unity. We tend to approach it as a zero-sum-game, meaning that “our” winning is dependent upon the “other” losing. Jesus proposes – and Paul proclaims – a radically different Way. How do we approach others in the zero-sum-game mentality in our season of great partisan division, blaming and alienation? How does Jesus call us to approach our neighbors, and brothers and sisters in faith, who differ from us in policy, perspective and political persuasion?**

***Talk with God about this, what is possibly stirring in your heart about how you might need to confess or change?**