

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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Breathing the Fresh Air of Liberty in Jesus Christ

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

***“Give Me that Old Time Religion
– Well, Maybe Not!”***

November 24, 2013

Sermon Text: Galatians 3:27 – 4:7

Scripture Reading: Acts 2

Introduction-

Martin Luther wrote:

When man, conscious of his failure to keep God’s command, is constantly urged by the Law to make payment of his debt and confronted with nothing but the terrible wrath of God and

eternal condemnation, he cannot but sink into despair over his sins. Such is the inevitable consequence where the Law alone is taught with a view to attaining heaven thereby. The vanity of such trust in works is illustrated in the case of the noted hermit mentioned in Vitae Patrum. (Lives of the Fathers). For over seventy years this hermit had led a life of utmost austerity, and had many followers. When the hour of death came he began to tremble, and for three days was in a state of agony. His disciples came to comfort him, exhorting him to die in peace since he had led so holy a life. But he replied: “Alas, I truly have all my life served Christ and lived austere; but God’s judgment greatly differs from that of men.”

Note, this worthy man, despite the holiness of his life, has no acquaintance with any article but that of the divine judgment according to the Law. He knows not the comfort of Christ’s Gospel. After a long life spent in the attempt to keep God’s commandments and secure salvation, the Law now slays him through his own works. He is compelled to

exclaim: “Alas, who knows how God will look upon my efforts? Who may stand before him?” That means, to forfeit heaven through the verdict of his own conscience. The work he has wrought and his holiness of life avail nothing. They merely push him deeper into death, since he is without the solace of the Gospel, while others, such as the thief on the cross and the publican, grasp the comfort of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Thus sin is conquered; they escape the sentence of the Law, and pass through death into life eternal.

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). *The Martin Luther Collection: 15 Classic Works* (Kindle Locations 11920-11932). . Kindle Edition.

Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is about the Law and the Promise – how they are very different in nature and purpose and yet how God uses the Law to drive people to the Promise. The Law is entirely condemnatory in its mission. The letter kills, as Paul puts it, but the Spirit gives life. The Law is written outside of us, on stone. The Promise is the realm of the Spirit who puts God’s Law on our hearts.

Nothing is more vital to us than a clear understanding of the differences between the Law and the Gospel. This is something that the Galatians very desperately needed to understand as

they were being lured away from the free grace of the Promise in Christ.

Let me read a bit more to you from Luther. This is taken from his introduction to his commentary on Galatians (it is often omitted from modern editions and that is a great loss)-

“St. Paul sets about establishing the doctrine of faith, grace, forgiveness of sins, or *Christian righteousness* and its difference from all other kinds of righteousness, for there are various sorts of righteousness. There is a political or civil righteousness which emperors, princes of the world, philosophers, and lawyers deal with. There is also a ceremonial righteousness, which human traditions teach. This righteousness may be taught without danger by parents and schoolteachers because they do not attribute to it any power to satisfy for sin, to please God, or to deserve grace; but they teach such ceremonies as are necessary simply for the correction of manners and certain observations concerning this life. Besides these, there is another righteousness, called the righteousness of the law or of the Ten Commandments, which Moses teaches. We too teach this, according to the doctrine of faith.

There is yet another righteousness that is above all these – namely, *the*

righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, which we must carefully distinguish from the other sorts mentioned above, for they are quite contrary to this righteousness, both because they flow out of the laws of rulers, the traditions of the church, and the commands of God, and also because they consist in our works and may be performed by us either by our natural strength or else by God's gift.

But this most excellent righteousness – that of faith, I mean – which God imputes to us through Christ, without works – is neither political nor ceremonial, nor is it the righteousness of God's law, nor does it consist in works. It is quite the opposite; that is to say, it is *passive*, whereas the others are *active*. *WE* do nothing in this matter; we give nothing to God but simply receive and allow someone else to work in us – that is, God. Therefore, it seems to me that this righteousness of faith, or Christian righteousness, can well be called passive righteousness.

Here, then, we need a wise and faithful teacher of the Word of God who can moderate the law so that it is kept within bounds. Anyone who teaches that people are justified before God by observing the law goes beyond the law and muddles these two kinds of righteousness, active and passive...

Last time we gave some contemporary examples of law which men have made and which they teach must be followed actively if we are to be righteous before God. It is a false gospel and they are false teachers.

Daily, moment by moment, our faith must be in Christ as our righteousness and thus the sure ground of our full acceptance by God.

Let's move on then and look at the last three verses of chapter 3 –

Galatians 3:27-29 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) 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. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

We are heirs of the Promise God made to Abraham if we are in Christ by faith. The Law did not change this when it came 430 years after the Promise. God has always intended to save His people by faith alone in the Seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Law drives people to Christ. It shows us our sin. But when faith comes, the law no longer is master over us. We have come of age, you might say, and are sons of God

with full privileges as heirs. ALL that the Father has given Christ, is ours.

For as Many of you....

“As many of you” means “all of you who were baptized into Christ.” I don’t think that water baptism is primarily what Paul has in mind here. Look at this parallel passage:

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (13) For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Many translations have “For BY one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,” because the little Greek preposition can be variously translated (in, with, by). I think then that the baptism Paul speaks of here is the work of the Holy Spirit joining us in union with Christ. Water baptism certainly is a symbol of this.

The Christian has been baptized into Christ by the Spirit and thereby has “put on Christ.” Paul uses this language with some frequency – putting off the old man and putting on the new. This has been accomplished through faith in Christ apart from our

own doings. When we believe in Christ, God removes our old sinful rags and puts a new royal robe of Christ on us.

But of course, this matter of putting off and putting on has a practical aspect to it in regard to our sanctification, in which we are active. We put off the flesh by refusing to let sin have its way. And we put on Christ by actively walking in the Spirit as He leads us in practical righteousness.

You have it again in Colossians –

Colossians 3:8-11 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. (9) Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices (10) and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (11) Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

In this sense then, we sons are all brethren! We are fellow countrymen. We are loyal to Christ and we all share in His nature and love for Him. This is what Paul means here in vs 28 –

(28) 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.

This is to emphasize the point Paul made in verse 26 – *for in Christ Jesus you are ALL sons of God, through faith.* ALL! Slaves, free citizens, men, women, people from all ethnicities – ALL! Go into ALL the world and preach the gospel.

This is a great advance on the Old Covenant in Israel. In Christ, ALL are heirs. The Spirit comes upon all.

Acts 2:17-18 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; (18) even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. (Reference to Joel 2)

Even on my male AND female servants you see. I don't know with certainty all that circumcision symbolized in the Old Covenant, but have you ever thought about it and wondered then what this said about a woman's standing in the old era? But in the New Covenant:

Romans 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. No matter who you are.

APPLICATION: It is vitally important then that we never permit ourselves to deny the gospel of faith alone, and thus it's offer to all kinds of people. Not in what we say or in what we do. Red, yellow, black, white – as the old Sunday School song goes.

Christians have not always done so well in this regard, and have let themselves get caught up in hypocrisy just as Peter did when Paul had to rebuke him.

Consider how the following evils deny the Promise:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Rich vs poor
- Nationality
- Young and Old

These kinds of things must never be allowed to creep in among us. Of late

we have been pointing out the terrible errors of patriarchal systems which not only press a false gospel of works-righteousness on people, but which maintain that men are superior to women. But Paul is quite clear here. Male or female – both are heirs according to Promise. Both are joined to Christ. Both are indwelt and led by His Spirit. And Peter reminds husbands of this:

1 Peter 3:7 Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

This does not mean of course that maleness and femaleness *literally* disappear in Christ. It doesn't mean that there are not fathers and mothers, boys and girls. Nor does it negate the instruction of Scripture regarding particular roles in the church. But it does mean that we must be on guard and never get drawn in to man-made false gospel traditions that declare one kind of person inferior to another, and which introduces prejudice and partiality among us.

One of the most sobering verses in Galatians for the church, if not in the entire Bible, is this-

Galatians 5:14-15 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (15) But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

We will consider it in more detail when we come to it later in this series, but let us all be warned. Where the gospel and Promise are distorted into the false gospel of law, legalism, works-righteousness, this is always going to be the practical outcome. Love is replaced with biting and devouring and consuming.

A false gospel of law transforms a flock of sheep into a pack of wolves.

Listen to Luther explain it:

When faith in Christ is overthrown peace and unity come to an end in the church. Diverse opinions and dissensions about doctrine and life spring up, and one member bites and devours the other, i.e., they condemn each other until they are consumed. To this the Scriptures and the experience of all times bear witness. The many sects at present have come into being because one sect condemns the other. When the unity of the spirit has been lost there can be no agreement in doctrine or life. New errors must appear without measure and without

end. For the avoidance of discord Paul lays down the principle: “Let every person do his duty in the station of life into which God has called him. No person is to vaunt himself above others or find fault with the efforts of others while lauding his own. Let everybody serve in love.”

Luther, Martin (2012-12-17). Commentary on Galatians (Kindle Locations 3023-3029). . Kindle Edition.

To such then is where the Law leads us. We must beware. A church in which some higher, superior standing with God, or in the estimate of other people, is based upon how well or how poorly people adhere to some body of human tradition is going to be a place of judgment, condemnation, and power-broking. Such traditions are normally unwritten, but everyone knows they are expected. And inevitably there will be some kind of “caste” system which is quite the opposite of verse 28.

Our righteousness is through faith alone in Christ alone, and to this we must cling with all of our might. The Law as a means of righteousness will leave no room for love, but only condemns.

Sons and Heirs, Not Minor Children

Listen now as I read 4:1-7. It is a very similar illustration to what Paul has already said earlier (3:23-25) with just a bit of a change in the picture:

Galatians 4:1-7 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, (2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (3) In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. (4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

We obtain the blessing promised to Abraham by faith, and this blessing which is ours (forgiveness of sins, eternal life, resurrection, the new heavens and earth...) comes to us by way of *inheritance*. Because we are sons of God in Christ, we are heirs of all that the Father has given the Son.

Now, what Paul wants to emphasize here once again is that *sons do not go back to their earlier status as children*. In a household (at least in Paul's day) the son of the father was put under the care of a trusted slave. The son, though a son, was no different than a slave while he remained in his minority (childhood). But when the day came that this child "came of age" and thus possessed legal right to his inheritance, he received it and he was no longer regarded as a child with no rights. You don't say to a 5 year old – "here are the keys to your car. Drive it anywhere you want." No, he isn't of age.

And this, Paul says, is how it was in God's plan in the era of the Law. The Law reigned until the "fullness of time" came (which was determined by the Father) and the Law's demands were dealt with by Christ so that we could be adopted as sons of God.

Let's consider a few of the phrases that Paul uses here. This morning we will just consider one such phrase and plan to examine the others ("born under the law," ; "Abba, Father" and others) -

1. Vs 3 – the "elementary principles of the world."

Before we came to faith in Christ, we were enslaved to what Paul calls these "elementary principles of the world."

He refers to the same thing in 4:8-10 -

Galatians 4:8-10 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. (9) But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (10) You observe days and months and seasons and years!

Let's see if we can get hold of what this phrase means.

The "elementary principles of the world" is a phrase that includes the Mosaic Law, but is broader in meaning yet. If you compare 3:23 with 4:2-3 we see plainly that the term does indeed include the Law. But remember that these Galatians were not all Jews. Gentiles were among them as well. So in what sense had these Gentiles been under slavery to the Law? The answer is that there is a fundamental identity between the false gospel the Jewish false teachers were bringing to them and the pagan religion they used to pursue and were enslaved to.

“Elementary principles” means something like the “basic building blocks of some system.” In this case, of the world. The ABC’s you might say of the cosmos. Just as individual letters are put together to form words, and then those words are joined to form sentences, so the universe has its ABC’s. The Greeks believed that the basic elements of the universe were earth, air, fire, and water. Pagans deified these elements, and others deified the Sun and the planets, the moon and fixed stars. F.F. Bruce says:

In what sense could it be said that the Galatian Christians in their pagan days were under the same ABC’s as had controlled Paul and his fellow-Jews? For the present stage of Paul’s argument it suffices to observe that the law ranks as one of the ABC’s.

The ABC’s (stoicheia), it is now made plain, not only regulated the Jewish way of life under law; they also regulated the pagan way of life in the service of gods that were no gods. To be enslaved to such counterfeit deities was to be enslaved to the stoicheia, and the Galatians would be enslaved to the stoicheia all over again if they ‘reverted’ not to their former paganism but to Jewish religious practices. That, as Paul saw it, his Gentile readers were tending to revert to a form of religion which they had practiced before their conversion to Christianity

is emphasized by his repeated “again” and “once more” in vs 9.

For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make; yet Paul makes it-not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position.

It is most probable that the Galatians’ observance of the cultic calendar (v 10) is adduced as evidence of reversion to the service of the stoicheia. The stoicheia, therefore, include the forces by which the calendar is regulated, and since the calendrical divisions are for the most part controlled by the movements of the planets, the planets may well be included among the stoicheia. Pagans had their sacred calendars, as the Jews had theirs, although they tended to ascribe divinity to the planets as the Jews did not. Paul is not thinking of any conscious reversion to planet-worship on the Galatians’ part; he means that by treating the sacred calendar as a matter of religious obligation they are in effect putting themselves in bondage to the forces that control the calendar.

From the context it may be gathered that the stoicheia ‘cover all the things

in which man places his trust apart from the living God; they become his gods, and he becomes their slave'

F. F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Galatians (New International Greek Testament Com (Eerdmans)) (Kindle Locations 3643-3644). Kindle Edition.

In other words, works-righteousness is idolatry and it is the religion of man. It is ingrained in the mind and character of fallen human beings. So much so, that the gospel of The Promise in which the blessing is obtained freely, by faith alone – is foolishness to the human mindset.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So *worldliness*? What is worldliness? Is it going to see a movie or drinking a beer or dressing in a particular way? Well, worldliness is a worldly mindset and it is more fundamental than these outward things – though, yes, it may be evidenced in some cases by those kinds of outward acts. But in its essence,

Worldliness is the philosophy that worships a false god who can be appeased by man's own works.

Therefore, the most outwardly "religious" person, such as the Pharisee, is the most worldly person to be found. The very ones who decry others for being "worldly" turn out to be the most worldly!

How many professing Christians then, and how many local churches have been caught up in the Galatian error and are, in fact practicing the religion of the world?

By faith alone, because of Christ alone, we have been brought into the full status of sons of God, and because we are sons, we are heirs of all He has promised. The Spirit who now resides within us is the Spirit of Christ His Son who witnesses to us that we now stand in the love of the Father, having passed out of the realm of condemnation under the Law.

So when someone comes along, singing this tune and inviting you to come and join them -

***Give me that old time religion
'Tis the old time religion,
'Tis the old time religion,
And it's good enough for me.***

...we had better be quite careful to ask "just what is this old time religion you are talking about?" Because more often than not it is a false gospel of man's tradition and works.