

“Christ’s Faithfulness”
Galatians 3:19-29
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
10.24.21
Sermon #118

Galatians 3:19-29 Common English Bible (CEB)

19 So why was the Law given? It was added because of offenses, until the descendant would come to whom the promise had been made. It was put in place through angels by the hand of a mediator.

20 Now the mediator does not take one side; but God is one. **21** So, is the Law against the promises of God? Absolutely not! If a Law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would in fact have come from the Law. **22** But scripture locked up all things under sin, so that the promise based on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to those who have faith. **23** Before faith came, we were guarded under the Law, locked up until faith that was coming would be revealed, **24** so that the Law became our custodian until Christ so that we might be made righteous by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian.

26 You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. **27** All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I don't know why I have a habit of delving into scripture that's written out of anger, but that's what we have here. Paul is angry.

Why? Why is Paul angry with the Church in Galatia?

Well, maybe we can imagine it happening like this. He's most likely in Macedonia or Achaia, about 500-700 miles from Galatia. And the man is working hard! The Spirit is moving in him to continue his ministry to get the churches going in that area. He's probably stressed enough as it is and trying to be as methodical as possible in his dealings with the churches. Maybe he's deep in prayer. Maybe he's trying to write a sermon. Who knows.

But, the shoe drops. Some people arrive to bring Paul some bad news. Bad news about the Galatian Church. The same church Paul has worked tirelessly, through the Spirit's guidance, to get off the ground. And yet, these people who are concerned with the

Galatian Church say something that would send chills down anyone's spine. "Paul, your work is being undermined."

You see, some persuasive traveling "evangelists" have come to Galatia. They seem to believe they have a better gospel than what Paul has preached. These evangelists preach that people must follow the Law faithfully in order to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Twisting the Law and twisting the Gospel.

Of course, these messengers are probably saying to the Apostle: "We realize that you do not adhere to that, Paul, nor do you preach it. For you preach that it is only Christ who fulfilled the Law and we are freed to live out the Spirit *of* the Law to love God, neighbor, and each other. Good sir, we get it and we agree wholeheartedly with

you. However, this traveling group of evangelists have persuaded so many people in the church that we are no longer one. Division has been sown. All we do is argue. And your work has been sabotaged. These evangelists are slandering you, attacking us, and persuading other people to terminate the work that has been done! Paul! Please get to Galatia ASAP!”

That’s why Paul is angry. After all, he just came from Galatia! So, he writes a letter. And it’s pointed and he ain’t wasting time! He’s calling out this band of fake preachers.

He’s astonished at the opening of the letter, after a quick greeting, that so many people have deserted him and ultimately, Christ. Paul

is calling out this problematic group of traveling preachers, even saying they should be placed under a curse!

He goes on in this letter. Paul reminds the listeners and readers of this pointed letter of his past. How he persecuted followers of Jesus before his Damascus experience. It was there on that Road to Damascus, Paul declares, that God's grace was shown to him by revealing Jesus Christ and Paul becomes an integral figure in the early life of the Church.

Paul continues in his letter of this controversy that's plaguing the church! People think they have to be circumcised and follow the Law to the letter. People think that they have power over their being made right before God. Yet, Paul says: "No! It is through

Christ's faithfulness that we are made right before God because of grace."

And then, immediately before today's passage in chapter three, Paul calls the Galatians "irrational" and wonders "who put a spell on them". He asks a series of questions about the Law that has obvious answers. "Was the Spirit given to you because you followed the Law that was given from Moses to the people? Have you done everything in it? Have you followed it to the letter faithfully?"

The obvious answer is no. No one has been able to follow the Law to the exact letter. No one has been able to fulfill it. No one can do it under their own strength and will.

So why did we have the Law? The Law, Paul answers starting in 3:19 and following, is given because of the brokenness that entered the world through our parents in the Garden of Eden. The Law, given to us by Moses and proclaimed over and over again by the prophets, points out our shortcomings. It holds up a mirror to our faces and shows us that we are fragile humans whose feeble powers cannot rescue themselves from the devastating effects of sin: Death, decay, lust, hate, war, etc.

The Law was like a custodian. Some translations have “tutor”, “guardian”, or “disciplinarian”. And that would certainly resonate with the 1st century Christians because people who had resources would hire custodians to take care of their little boys. The

custodians kept the boys on a short leash, instructed them, and watched them carefully. After many years of constantly enforcing restraint upon the boys, they would be trusted with a new-found freedom once they matured. And that is Paul's point to the Galatians. The Law is indeed important. We needed the Law. Yet, no one can fulfill the Law. But, there is one who did. And that person is Jesus Christ. He came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it. And through his faithfulness of his birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection, he fulfilled the Law.

And while the Law convicts us—holding a mirror to our faces—and restrains us—like the custodian and the boy—because of God at work through Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law, we live out the Spirit *of* the Law in our lives as beloved children of God. And Jesus

told us how the Spirit *of* the Law can be summed up: Love God, love neighbor, and love ourselves.

Now, I want to be clear about this. Paul is not saying to ignore the Law. But, we are to continue to study it, which is what we do as Reformed Christians in the PCUSA and live out its spirit through the love of God that has been poured out in us through the Holy Spirit. We do not simply throw out the Law which was given to our ancestors who were wandering in the wilderness for decades. We do not ignore the word of God spoken through the prophets who spoke truth to power. We study the Hebrew Scriptures as it is very much a part of our DNA.

Our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ was able to fulfill the Law. Only he could do that. And because of his faithfulness in his life, death, and resurrection, we live out the Spirit *of* the Law and we are one in Christ.

And as we are one in Christ, there is no male nor female. No slave nor free. No Jew nor Gentile. No rich nor poor. Because we have been given the faith to be clothed with Christ through Baptism, there is no distinction among God's children. We are on an equal plane before God. We are one and we belong to Christ.

Yet, there are people, like this band of fake traveling preachers that promoted division in Paul's day. They proclaim that there is more to do than faith in Christ Jesus. Or maybe these fraudulent preachers

claim that God's love is limited. We have these so-called preachers who are nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing. They will do whatever they can to undermine the work of the Spirit that has been done faithfully. They will prey off of the insecurities of people. They will scatter the seeds of doubt.

These fake preachers come in the form of those who create obstacles for anyone who may look like the exact people Jesus ministered to in his life. These fraudulent evangelists are the ones who say: "If you give me money for my private jet, vacation home in Aruba, and my Italian-made suits, God will bless you with health and wealth!" These counterfeit disciples are the ones who create division by proclaiming a god of white supremacy and conspiracy

theories while they hide behind their white sheets, swastikas, and social media accounts.

It's all around us. Just as it was around Paul. He called them out for perverting the Gospel. And we are to call out those who pervert the Gospel, too, in whatever form it presents itself. We are to be vigilant and stay grounded in prayer with our LORD, scriptures, and relationship with each other.

Kindred in Christ, we are one in the LORD. God's love far surpasses all human understanding. The table of our Savior where we gather to break the bread and drink the cup continues to be expanded. The fences and walls that people erect to attempt exclusion, Christ's breaks those down with no problem. And when

our hearts start to harden, the Holy Spirit melts us in various ways and uses different people to call us out on our shortsightedness.

Because of Christ's faithfulness, we are one in the LORD. There is no distinction. No division. And there is nothing our feeble human strength can do on its own to fulfill the Law. Yet, our Savior Jesus Christ, through his faithful work of his birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection has fulfilled the Law. And as God's beloved children, who have been given the Holy Spirit's transforming power of love in our hearts, we are to live out the Spirit *of* the Law: Love God, love neighbors, and love ourselves. No division. No distinction. Only unity in our LORD.

Siblings in Christ, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.