

Galatians 3:23-29
Our Primary Identity
5.16.21

With a bit of a skip

Last week due to Mother's Day

We have been looking at the early church's

Struggle in how to incorporate

People not Jewish in background.

We discussed how the Jewish Christians

Wanted to decide for themselves who was in.

The major sticking point was Jewish Law

And most specifically male circumcision.

Jews required it.

The Gentiles didn't want anything to do with it.

So what was the church to do?

These people were coming to faith in Jesus

Clearly infected and impacted by the Holy Spirit.

Were they just going to kick them all out?

Become all exclusive, Jews-only-type thing?

Or were they going to follow the Spirit and be inclusive?

The church sent representatives to Jerusalem

To discuss matters.

And they came away with a decision
Not bother the new Christians
With such culturally selective requirements.

Peter summed it up nicely when he said

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?

¹¹ On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

Just as they will.

They being whom?

Anyone and everyone not a Jew.

In our previous discussions

We looked back through Scripture

And discovered that God's plan

Included the salvation of Gentiles all along.

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Just some thoughts on this word *Gentile*

It is Latin.

But the Greek word the Bible uses for Gentile is ethnos.

And so in that sense, a Gentile is a person

That belongs to a different ethnicity or nation.

When we hear the word Gentile

We should have in mind
Someone or a group of people
Of a different ethnicity.

And so, the argument came down to this.

Was salvation available for all people
Regardless of ethnicity
Or just for the Jews?

And the answer was and still is, yes,
Salvation was available to anyone
Who called upon the name of the Lord.

And they didn't have to submit to Jewish law.

Well, it was a hard lesson for the Jewish Christians.

They considered themselves the chosen people
Set apart from all the others
A people God had placed special favor.

And from that perspective
The Jewish Christians asked themselves
How can we agree to this?

It went against everything they've been taught to obey.

In the passage from Galatians
Paul continues the argument.

Paul makes the comparison between law and faith.

The law was a means not to salvation
But to a healthier and more wholesome life.

God essentially created the law
As guidelines for better living.

Marla Bieber Abe, a retired Brethren minister
Commented on this passage
In the Facebook group page Narrative Lectionary

*I once talked with a Jewish man about the laws of diet, etc,
and asked him what he thought about them. He told me that
with the Fall, chaos entered the world.*

*The Laws are a way to slowly re-order and redeem the
world. Observances, healthy eating, healthy relationships,
etc.*

But the law had come to be viewed
As a very rigid and strict code of conduct.

It had become an oppressive set of commandments.

Paul says, but now, faith in Jesus Christ
Has entered our reality and with that salvation.

Paul says

Galatians 3:25 NLT And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.

Paul says faith in Jesus shall now be our guiding light
Our hope for the future.

²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

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We need to go back to the very beginning
When God called Abraham to form a nation.

In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham
To leave his country
And go to the region God will show him.

Genesis 12:2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you.

Here is this word nation
Which is the word Gentile, which is the word *ethnos*.

God will make Abraham a father of a great ethnicity.

Now in Genesis 22
God goes a step further with God's covenant.

Genesis 22:18 NLT And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—

This is where Paul gets this idea.
When he said, "We are **all** heirs to the promise."

Ok, so now, having said that

There's been talk these days on how we self-identify.

Who am I?

Who are we?

Am I white? Black?

European American? African American? Latinx?

Am I a man? A woman?

A Mother? Father? Husband? Wife?

Am I a Democrat? A Republican?

Am I gay? Straight? Or neither?

Am I Brethren? Protestant? Christian?

These are the questions of self-identification today?

During Paul's time

Similar questions were being asked?

Am I a Jew? Or a Christian?

Can I be a Jew and be a Christian?

Can I be a Gentile and be a Christian?

How do we self-identify?

Paul seeks to answers these questions.

Galatians 3:27 CEV when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes.

As people come to faith in Christ Jesus
Their self-identity changes.

All of these other identifiers, though significant
Aren't as significant
As our identity as people of God, in Christ.

Galatians 3:28 NRSV 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.

When we clothe ourselves in Christ
We will no longer be, now hear me well

We will no longer be primarily identified
By our ethnicity (Jew or Gentile)
By our gender (male or female)
Or by our social status (slave or free)

All of those other identifiers are of less importance
Because in Christ, we become one.

We now identify as Christian
Followers of Christ, children of a living God.

That's the reality in our relationship with Jesus
And yet, as we see in today's divided world
Yet to be fully realized.

But that's the promise.

And that is the story of redemption history in the Bible.

Moving from scattered, incohesive groups of people

God unites us as one

Rich in diversity but united in Christ.

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We looked at the beginning of the Bible

In Genesis at God's initial promises

That all nations (Gentiles) will come to be blessed.

To the last book of the Bible

To see the promised fulfilled.

Revelation 7:9-10 NLT ⁹ After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. . . . ¹⁰ And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"

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As an example

I think of the country of Nigeria.

Depending on whose list you agree with

There are anywhere from 250 to 500 tribes

In Nigeria.

There has been tribal conflict since forever.

Add to the problem

The two main religions, Christianity and Islam
And you can understand the huge divisions
In the country.

People first identify by their tribe.

I am Hausa.

I am Fulani.

I am Yoruba.

I am Igbo.

That is their first and foremost self-identification.

Their second self-identifier is their faith.

I am Muslim.

I am Christian.

But they are all Nigerian.

If everyone within the country

Could primarily self-identify as Nigerian

First and foremost

And not by their tribe

A lot more unity and hence cooperation could be possible.

But until then, more division and chaos.

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When we discover our common identity

As people of God, humans inhabiting the same planet

We move in the direction of unity.

I believe one of the reasons God sent Jesus
Was to accomplish this.

John 3:16 CEV God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die.

18 No one who has faith in God's Son will be condemned.

Let that sink in.

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Being in Christ doesn't lessen the importance
Of our other identities, our ethnicity, or our gender.

It just places them in sequence of importance.

How do I self-identify?

I won't go around declaring my identity
By my politics or sexual preference.

Hi, I am a white, middle-aged, married, heterosexual!

I am left of center in my politics
I am right of center in my theology.

And by the way, I am a Christian.

No!

Paul is telling us to identify first and foremost
As followers of Jesus Christ.

I am a child of God's.
You are a child of God's

I am a follower of Christ.

That's who we are!

We are no longer primarily identified by our ethnicity
Nor by our gender
Nor by our social status

For we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Isn't this Good News?

And shouldn't we be proclaiming it?