

Faith in Christ: Identity and Unity

Galatians 3:26-29

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Let us turn to Galatians Chapter 3, and we'll read together verses 26 through 29. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Father, we ask now that You would send the Holy Spirit to teach us of our identity and of our unity that we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Open the eyes of our understanding, we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Last time we looked at Galatians chapter three, we considered the purpose of the law outlined for us in verses 15 through 25, where the Apostle Paul shows that the purpose of the law as a covenant was a temporary arrangement where God gave His law to His old covenant people—613 laws initially distributed on Mount Sinai but expounded, so the ten expounded through the Pentateuch. And what Paul was simply showing is that the old covenant's law was serving as a temporary arrangement in redemptive history to both magnify transgressions and to reveal our need of Jesus Christ as Savior. Now, although this has personal application still to us today and to all people that are outside of Christ, still the law, in a sense, brings them to Christ as they see the reality of their sin. What Paul was trying to show in the grand scheme of things is that this was a shift in redemptive history that the Judaizers were not understanding, nor the Galatians were understanding, and what was resulting was that they were coming back under the law, trying to perfect that which Christ had accomplished on the cross. So the Judaizers were saying things like, "Yes, we believe Jesus died for our sins, of course we do, but you must also be circumcised, just as Abraham was and others like Moses." And those were... What Paul was trying to show the Galatians is that the promise came before the law, and the law didn't annul or change the promise; in fact, the law just ran alongside the promise, serving the promise. But now that it has served the promise, we have been brought into a new covenant, this side of redemptive history, this side of the cross, which then results in all of God's people, both Jew and Gentile, being received by God as His covenant peo-

ple through faith alone. This is God's covenants of grace and God's mercy, and this shift is seen, for example, in verse 23, where he says things like this: "But before faith came, we were kept under the law," or in verse 25, "but after that faith has come, we're no longer under a schoolmaster." Now, what do you mean, Paul, "after that faith has come," like there was faith always there? Haven't you... Well, Hebrews wasn't written yet, but we could say if we're talking with him now, "Haven't you read Hebrews chapter 11? You've just told us that there's this great hall of faith that existed of all these people." And Paul would say to you, "No, no, I'm not talking about faith in a personal sense. I am talking about the era marked by faith. I'm talking about this dispensation. I am talking about this side of redemptive history. I'm talking about this covenant, the new covenant, that all the people that belong to it are marked by a certain faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah." So it marked the people of the old covenant were signs like circumcision, were signs like Sabbath-keeping, and among God's people, there were those who were truly belonging to the covenant in the sense that they were true believers in Jesus Christ or looking forward to Christ. But there was a mixed multitude; not everyone in the covenant belonged to the Lord, even though they sought to uphold the law. It does not mean that they had saving faith, but the promise of the new covenant is a promise that extends to every person in the covenant and recognizes them as true believers in the Lord. For example, the new covenant says, "And they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. I will put My Spirit within them. I will write their laws on their heart. I will cause them to walk in My ways." What is simply trying to show is that what couldn't be accomplished under the old covenant by means of the law, God will fulfill through His Son, as the new covenant of His blood has been poured out, and these people, all in the covenant, are redeemed by Him and caused to walk in His ways. And this effect of the new covenant, this era, this side of the cross on which we stand now, should shape our interpretation of verses 26 to 29. Why? Simply for this reason: Paul goes on to address the Galatians. Now he's saying, "We were kept under God. We were kept on the... God is talking about himself included among the Jews, but he says, 'But you, now for you, all the sons of God.' Now he turns to a church made up of Jew and Gentile, and he says, 'You all the sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. You are all one in Christ.' And he says, 'If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and you are heirs according to the promise.'" He shows that the effects of the coming of this new era marked by faith, the era of the new covenant, has come and broken down the middle wall of partition that separated Jew and Gentile for the long history of the Bible as you read in the Old Testament. And now God's people are marked by a new identity made up of Jews and Gentiles, and slaves and free, and all that belonging to one body, and therefore they ought to have a new unity because of that new identity that they have received by reason of the death of Jesus Christ. So no longer are God's people marked by circumcision,

as it were, or Sabbath-keeping, but by faith—faith in Christ. For how can a Gentile woman be circumcised, or a Gentile male, even if he was, how could he be accepted in the innermost sanctuary of the Lord? No, impossible. But God has done something through His Son to make it possible, whereby He's gathered the outcasts of all the world who put their faith in Jesus Christ and has formed one new man and has made peace through the blood of His cross. And so He says in verse 26 that simply, you have a new identity. What is the new identity of the new covenant people of God that marks all the people in the covenant, both Jew and Gentile? Well, He says, "You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ." The sons of God in the Old Testament marked a kind of family covenantal relationship between God and His people. You have Adam called the sons of God. I'm not going to get into the whole angels and the sons of God, but in one sense, they are part of the heavenly family of God. You also have David, who is called the son of God. And then you have Israel, who is called God's son. When Moses was talking to the Lord there at the burning bush, and he was going to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, from their bondage and slavery, this is what the Lord said to Moses: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me." He says, "You tell this to Pharaoh, that Israel's My firstborn son. Let him go that he may serve Me." In Jeremiah 31:9, He says, "For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." And so this wonderful sonship belonged to God's covenant people, the children of Israel, under the Old Covenant. But what you find in the historical narrative, as the unfolding of God's covenant promises being outplayed in the life of the nation of Israel, is that you find that God has a greater Son, a divine Son, in that it is the Lord Jesus Christ, who has proceeded from the Father, who is eternal God—okay, God the Son. But more than that, He is also God's Son in the sense that He is the one who will be seated upon the throne. He is the one that would receive the nations as His inheritance, and He is the one who will rule as the Son of God and will have God's blessing and favor upon Him as God's Son. And so what we must remember is, as we see in Scripture, "For unto us a child is born, and a Son is given," and we see that this is the one who is to be called the Everlasting Father, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace. We see the divine Son, but we must never forget the Son of Psalm 2: "This day have I begotten You," which He speaks of in terms of the resurrection and the ascension of our Lord, "and I will give You as an inheritance the nations." The privileged one of God is none other than the Messiah Himself. And this Son of God steps into time, steps into our world, and He goes to a cross and dies for our sins. And the Bible says to us, not so that He could gather necessarily Israel alone to Himself, but He might gather together all the children of God scattered abroad.

What does that tell us? Well, it tells us that God's people is expanding from the vicinity of the land of Palestine, from the vicinity of the Israelites,

to those among the nations who were not the sons of God. And Jesus, the Son of God, He says, "Out of Egypt have I called My son," who comes into this world, and He comes and is spared by the Lord in His life and then given up by the Lord in His death, so that you and I may be called the children of God. As I mentioned earlier, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." We are sons by reason of the true Son of God, who has brought us into that sonship, who has cleansed us, who has made us clean, who reconciled us to God. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name." Now, the law could never secure such a privilege or an identity, a new identity, for the Gentiles; there was no chance. And this would have been shock horror news to the Judaizers—sharing sonship with those that ought to be regarded as dogs, who cannot even enter into the sanctuary of the Lord. How can it be? The highest privilege of the covenant people of God, the sons of God, now bestowed on these Gentiles that we should even be eating with... You could see the tension within their hearts. God granting an identity to those that they had despised and rejected, an identity equal with theirs because of the blood of Jesus Christ.

And Paul goes on to explain this new identity in verses 27 and 28, as showing that this new identity should lead to a new unity. Look at what he says here in verse 27: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." There's a new unity here. You are all the sons of God; that's your new identity. Therefore, you are all one in Christ.

Now, we must acknowledge the inclusivity of such a statement as this. Look at what it says in verse 27: "For as many of you as..." For as many of you as, yes, described here in verse 28—Jew, Gentile, you name it, you go through the varieties, the distinctions that exist amongst culture, amongst people. Here, He is simply saying that all of you, slave and free, as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ, and therefore you are Christ's, your sons and daughters of the Living God. And He's saying this new unity, therefore, should breed a oneness or result in a oneness among God's people. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

Now, what does He mean by that? Is Paul proposing that physical baptism unites you to Christ, just as covenant Old Testament circumcision united people to the covenant people of God? Well, if Paul was saying that, he would be undermining his entire argument thus far. He's been showing that it's by grace alone, through faith alone, and not by the works of the law, that a man should be justified. As you say, "Oh, well, hang on, there's

one new law here; it's baptism. And if you get baptized, your sins will be washed away, and therefore you'll be regarded as the people of God, and therefore it's faith plus baptism." No, not at all. Paul is not referring to that.

Well, then, what is he referring to? His whole argument of justification by faith cannot be undermined at this point, as so many false teachers seek to do. So, what does Paul mean? Well, what we must first understand is that baptism and conversion are closely related in the New Testament. So, for example, a person who wanted to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved and was moved by God would publicly confess their faith in the waters of baptism and would be baptized. And therefore, in Acts chapter 2, verse 38, what must we do to be saved? Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." He's not saying that baptism is that the water actually affects the washing; he's not saying the water actually unites you to God, your Savior. No, not at all. He simply is showing that your entering into the waters of baptism is a public demonstration of an internal reality that you believe and are unashamed to confess Christ as Lord, as God, and as King.

So they used to say to those being baptized, "Do you renounce sin and the devil and Satan? Do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?" And they'll publicly confess their faith, and they would baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, showing their union with Christ. Baptism, therefore, then, was an outward sign of an inward union. The true baptism is the baptism by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:13, that the Spirit unites us to Christ by reason of our faith in Jesus Christ, as Romans chapter 6 also points out those very things.

But one thing Paul is making a note of here that I think is more important for us to understand regarding the context is this: that baptism is part of our identification, as it relates to what I was saying just earlier about it being an outward sign. It regards our identification. Look what he says there in that verse: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ..." Let's not finish there. "...have put on Christ." Baptism in Scripture demonstrated a certain allegiance and a submission to the message that has been proclaimed. Think about it just with me for a moment. Acts chapter 19, you have these people that say, Paul says, "Have you been baptized?" And they said, "We've only been baptized into John's baptism." What does that mean? Well, they identified with John's message, and they were baptized by John, and therefore they were disciples of John, as that passage also refers to. And also, what you find there is that they were identified, therefore, with John and his message.

Now, they obviously didn't get the message entirely right because Paul had to expound to them that he spoke of this one who was to come, which was

Christ, and then he baptized them again in the name of the Lord Jesus. But there was baptism; there is shown as to be an identification, as it were, with the message. Now, what about Moses in 1 Corinthians chapter 10? This is the children of Israel were baptized into Moses through the Red Sea. How do you get baptized into Moses through the Red Sea when they weren't even wet one bit? Well, the point was is that they were baptized into Moses, meaning that they were simply united to Moses through the Red Sea. And the beautiful thing about that is, is that when you see them coming out of the Red Sea in the book of Exodus, the end of the book of Exodus, chapter 14, verse 31, says this: "Israel saw the great work which the Lord had done and believed the Lord and His servant Moses." What happened by them, as it were, passing through the Red Sea, there was an identification with Moses as God's man who was being sent to do God's work, and they believed in the Lord, and they identified there with Moses.

With understanding all that, then let's think about baptism this way: "As many of us has been baptized into Christ, here we have it, have put on Christ." Put on Christ as a garment. By our baptism, we identify with Christ as Lord. We show our allegiance to Him who is King. We bow in submission to His authority. We are baptized unto Him as His disciples, and therefore we wear Him as a garment. This is the idea that as many of us have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. And therefore, baptism is that expressive demonstration of the internal change that has been wrought by the Holy Spirit within us.

And what Paul is simply trying to show them here is that your baptism marked a new den of identification because when you were baptized into Christ, you put on Christ as a garment. Now, clothing is much more than just an outward covering, and clothing speaks of internal realities, also certain allegiances, perhaps for some more than others, depending on how caught up in certain fashion statements they are or whatever it may be. But in the general sense, this is part of what clothing represents, the kind of language that speaks of things that perhaps are in the heart. You can think of it in certain extreme terms of certain kinds of immodesty or certain kinds of extravagance, where men and women don't dress but basically undress, and often that can speak to certain inward issues like maybe insecurity, maybe pride, maybe wanting to be seen by others, maybe to draw the attention of others. Maybe it could be simply just a fashion statement that is being made, showing a certain allegiance to a kind of fashion culture or whatever it may be.

I think this is also seen in the wearing of a jersey. You know, someone wears a jersey; it might represent the fact that they have certain allegiances to a certain team, which they love and which they represent, and they wear a jersey to speak of their team's allegiance. And so, when we think of bap-

tism into Christ and putting on Christ, what we're seeing is we're putting on Christ as a garment, which demonstrates to the world that holiness of life, that submission to His authority, that obedience to His commandments, that living in accordance to His will. It demonstrates to the world around us that we are Christ's, and we belong to Him. I'm in union with Him. I am one with Him. I wear Him, as it were, as a garment. And so, it's deeper than the superficial covering of a garment alone. It speaks of an internal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what Paul is trying to say is that your new identity produces a new unity, despite the differences of culture, race, gender, financial, social status. Your unity as God's people is rooted in a more fundamental reality than those outward things that differ among us—faith in Christ, putting on Christ, being baptized into Christ. These are the things that make us Christ's, and therefore, these are the things that make us one. And therefore, these are the things that should mark our identity as we live in this world.

And so, in verse 29, he says these words: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Well, hang on a minute. I can be Abraham's child without being circumcised? Yes, through Christ, through Christ. And so, the main question that he is pointing out here, which all the people in the churches of Galatia should ask themselves, which we also should ask ourselves this morning, is, "Am I Christ's?" This is the fundamental question about my unity with one another and about my new identity. "Oh, but I'm not Jew. Oh, but I'm a Gentile. Oh, but I'm poor. But I'm a slave. But I do this job, or I'm a male, or I'm a female. How can I belong to Christ?" And He's saying, "If you believe in Christ, you are Christ's, and all the privileges of the promise made to Abraham are yours, despite the color of your skin, despite the continent upon which you live, despite your upbringing and your culture, and the food you like or don't like. You are Christ's if you have faith in Christ and have put on Christ."

Can you see the wisdom of that? The things that mark the world's divisions become the Christian's diversity because of Christ. If you do a scan of church history briefly and ask yourself what has been the very things that have divided countries, peoples, and cultures in all the continents, you can restrict it down to these categories: race, gender, social status. No matter where—among the whites, among the blacks, among the Asians, among the Arabs—even among people of their own color or of their own race, there are caste systems; there are divisions internally among all the nations of the earth because there is this inward darkness in the heart of man. And untold harm and abuse has marked the generations that have preceded us and still marks our day today, simply because people find their identity and their security in their differences, their distinctions.

But the beautiful thing about this passage is it's not telling us that all distinctions are abolished in Christ. Men will always be men; women will always be women. When you get saved, you don't lose your culture. When you become a believer in Jesus, you don't change; those things don't change. So what is Paul referring to here? What he's simply trying to say is that when you come to Jesus Christ, there is an identity that transcends all human distinctions and brings us together as one, and that is that we are sons of God. So despite your culture, we can get along. Despite male or female, we can get along. And what Paul is trying to say is that despite poor and rich, in the same congregation, those people can be worshipping the same God, praising the name of the Lord, rejoicing in the same truth, holding high the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, eating from the same table as one bread and one cup, and they eat together and drink together. Why? Because the middle wall of partition has been broken down, and we are all the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

What Paul is saying is that in this temple, that is the temple of the Church of God, there is no court of the Gentiles, there is no court of the women, there is no court of the Israelites, and the court of the priests, which segregated people in the tabernacle of the Old Covenant. No, the way has been opened, the curtain has been torn, the blood has been shed for people of every kindred, every tribe, every tongue, and every nation. The middle wall of partition has been broken down, and so we don't have to segregate and say, "Women on this side," as some cultures do, "men on that side," or "we can't pray together," or "we can't worship together," or somehow because of your financial status, you are less important to the Church of God and to God. No, we are one in Christ, and therefore, as we approach God's temple, as we gather to worship in God's temple, we hear a song, and it's not the song of national anthems, nor the song of division and party spirits, or of some kind of liberation party or woke kind of agenda.

No, when we come and hear, as it were, and lay our ear on the temple of heaven, we hear a song, a new song of God's people, singing and saying, "You are worthy, O God, to take the scroll and to open the seals, for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every kindred, tribe, tongue, people, and nation." You hear a people that exalt the worthiness of God and see their unworthiness. You see both rich and poor saying, "I am poor in my relationship to God. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You see a culture of men and women, both around the throne, both worshipping the Lamb, both praising the Savior, both singing the praises of His redeeming blood. You see people that are slaves, masters and slaves, both saying, "We were slaves to sin, but by the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been rescued. By the blood of Jesus Christ, we have been delivered."

And this is what Paul went to the church of Galatia to see, and this is what we should be meditating upon this morning. What song do we sing? Well, let me put it this way: What garments are we wearing? Worldly garments? Holy garments? Heavenly garments that unite us together as sons of God? Or that which distinguishes us on earth? So much of Christ's Church today is divided over politics, over social issues, over racial issues, and even, sadly, over tertiary doctrinal standards that are not fundamental to the fact that we are children and sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But the thing that God's people need to understand is that we are Christ's. We don't belong to, as it were, Donald Trump, or to Albanese, or to Israel, or to Palestine, or to some kind of agenda pushed by YouTube influencers. These are not the garments that we ought to be wearing that mark us and shape us. We are Christ's.

And so many of God's people are consumed by current affairs to the point that the only song that proceeds out of their lips is an allegiance to a certain agenda going on in the world. And very little do you hear of the glories of God and His gospel in Jesus Christ. And the church becomes fractured; people start looking at each other through lenses of your political agenda, or what's your view on this situation or that situation, and it kind of measures whether or not I'm going to receive you or not. Paul says, "You're all the sons of God in Christ Jesus, and you don't get to choose your brothers and sisters. God has called them out of darkness. God has brought them into the kingdom of light."

But what we must be careful of is wearing those garments that do not represent Christ and Him crucified and risen. So much of our hours can be poured into stressing over that which will perish, and you and I forget that our citizenship is in heaven, from where we look for the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is coming again. Christ put on our sin. Christ put on our shame. Christ identified with our sin; He identified with our guilt; He identified with our shame, that we might be united to Him, that our allegiance would be His, that our love would be demonstrated towards Him, and we would adore and live to the praise of His glorious grace. He died to unify a people to Himself, not so that they might be divided on issues that do not count for eternity.

It must be in our hearts very clear that we are Christ's. And who are Christ's? We should be thinking about, and those who are Christ's, we should be thinking about them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Now, I am not saying do not read your newspaper, and I am not saying do not keep up to date with what's going on in the world and having your beliefs and your convictions about certain events and even taking the word of God to them so we can know how to think rightly about them. This is not what

I'm trying to say. What I'm trying to say is this: Simply, when you come to your dying day, and when you are on your dying bed, or when people rock up one day to your funeral, will they testify of you that he loved Christ, that his allegiance was to Christ? He did not serve God and mammon. He was consumed with Christ. She was consumed with Christ. Christ was her or his, or, and they loved Christ and His people and His gospel. This was her passion; this was his plea; this was their song. They were singing along the road, praising the Lord, praising the Lord, because all they could be taken up in was God Himself and His wonder, His love.

You see, with this kind of emphasis, it is very hard to divide the Lord's people. But as soon as we get off track and get caught up with things that are not the main things, what ends up happening to God's people is they start to fracture, and there will be the beginning of division in the Church of Jesus Christ. And therefore, as God's people, we ought to guard our hearts lest our affections be taken up with things not of Christ and His gospel, lest we be found wearing garments that are not Christ's, lest we be found as it were standing with the enemies of the cross against the very people of God themselves. We must be careful of infiltrating affections that the media and things around us try and make us think that this is the big thing. You watch your news, and by the end of it, you think the only hope that we have in this life is if this politician makes that decision. Don't you understand? Jesus is coming again, and kings will come down and fall, and at the final day, they will all fall before Him who sits on the throne, and they'll give an account of themselves to God.

Don't you understand that in the final analysis, Jesus will set the record straight? We cry injustice, but don't you think God sees the blood of those that are perishing and will not repay them on the final day? But how Satan comes into the hearts of God's people and whispers to them about lies about justice, to take vengeance in their own hands, to take up causes which God has not called us to take, and next thing you know, you're a master of modern media, but you are not a master of God's Word. You can quote to us the latest headlines, but you cannot even quote a passage of scripture for comfort in the time of your distress and discouragement.

It is amazing how many of God's people are professional in fields that God has not called them to and are illiterate in the Word of God. And no wonder why there's division in God's church, for we have not set our affection on things above, rather on things on the earth, because we're not looking to the things which are unseen, which are eternal, but the things which are seen. And when we look at the things that are seen, we easily get agitated, we easily get frustrated, we easily throw up our arms and think to ourselves that I must do something to change this now, or it will never change.

I can remind you that God is on the throne, and He is gathering His people, and nothing will stop Him, so that in the final day, He will gather His elect from the four winds of the earth, and we will be robed in righteousness and be coming in the clouds with great power and glory with our Savior. And then, for all eternity, we'll be singing the song of the Lamb. What Paul is saying is just focus on that right now. Don't lose sight of that right now. That's your identity; that's who you are. You are Christ's, and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed. If you're Abraham's seed, you are heirs, sons; you will receive the inheritance that God has promised to you. And therefore, live as one with the sons of God. Live as God's family. Live in peace among one another.

Let us pray.