

“The One True Religion”
Sermon for 19 June 2016
Texts: Galatians 3:10-14

While the President frets about the PC way to handle the murder of fifty gays in an Orlando bar—he seems to be anxious that the religion of Islam suffer no bad press for the Islamic Extremist, claimed by ISIS, who killed and wounded so many Americans. He is in a tight spot. It will be a hard sell. And we who suffered this loss, and who grieve with the families which lost loved ones, are subjected to censorship from the highest office in the land. We may be sure that if a Christian had perpetrated this capital offense, his religious identity would be plastered all over the FBI and police reports—all Christians would be tainted with the crime and expected to just take it. When it comes to special treatment, there is no equal treatment—not even fair treatment. Somehow our President doesn't think we, the people, can figure out that not all Muslims are extremists, just as not all Christians are haters and bigots. But where censorship is applied, the public is prevented from exercising discretion and exhibiting nuance.

I said the President is in a tight spot because, if the truth be known, there is only one true religion *and it is not Islam*. Indeed, only one religion qualifies and that is Christianity. Our passage today illustrates this inconvenient truth. Let's get to it. All religions other than Christianity are built on the foundational idea that *men obey God to please God to obtain blessings from God* (or, gods). The posture of Christianity is absolutely contrary to this: Christians obey God out of gratitude because they have already been blessed. Christians are grateful, not fearful. They aren't worried about losing their salvation by disappointing God. Why? Because our salvation is not contingent on what we do, rather we are saved because of what Christ has done on our behalf. His perfect obedience and His satisfaction of God's justice achieved by Him for us—and by grace through faith we are saved (Eph. 2:8) In His **Beloved Son** the Father is **well-pleased** and by His resurrection God affirmed the perfection and the completion of Christ's finished work on the cross. Christ's sacrifice was sufficient and perfect, **once for all**. Therefore, not only are we not fearful of failure to measure up, we are not afraid of the wrath of God falling on us today, tomorrow, or on the Great Judgment day when Christ returns for us! Everyone else needs to heed the wrath of God—not those who are saved by the blood of the Lamb. Even more, Christians are not driven by any motive of acquisition *as if we hope to obtain what we already have!* If someone should seek what he already has, you would have to wonder at them! What are you thinking? Doing?

Because of these great, in-hand benefits, Christians possess a glad servant's heart but not a servile spirit—we aren't cringing, terrified or obsequious persons. We do not grovel like whimpering puppies awaiting their beating. Jesus took the beating for us. We are so grateful! We are cleansed, purified and blessed as children of God. In Ephesians 5.8 we read, **You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light**. There is a corollary to this principle: as redeemed children who want to be like Christ, it is splendid to know on Father's Day especially, that Christ, who is the **exact image of the Father**—means that when we live unto the Lord, when we are the spittin' image of Christ, we are

also presenting an accurate, and winsome picture of our Father in heaven to the world! No other religion does that! Not even close.

So we obey because we have been saved, not in order to be saved! The same pattern is found in 1 John 4:19: **We love God because He first loved us!** What a relief! What a huge difference the divine initiative makes! We rejoice to let others know that religion doesn't save anyone. It never has, never will. It is not what we do, could do, or aspire to do, but what has already been done, to perfection, that saves us. Does that mean we cannot be saved by rites, rituals customs, creeds, sacraments or traditions? *Well, yes, it does*. Nothing could be clearer or more freeing—and, perhaps, for other religionists, discomfiting. But by being fully reconciled, justified and made right with God by the work of Jesus on the cross, and by receiving this by faith, we are saved to the uttermost. No one can be better saved, no one can be more saved than we are saved. By grace through faith we are redeemed through Christ alone.

Practically speaking this means that if we, being thus saved, should ever attempt to do His will in order to be saved, we would be recommitting the Galatian error! (3:1) When Paul exclaims who has bewitched, charmed and misled you, we should take this as a warning to ourselves to never, ever fall into this trap.

It is the case that outwardly we may resemble other religionists. Some even claim that all religions are the same, and all faiths point to the same God. This is palpably false. Suffice it to say that the two chief distinctions are the specifics of the salvation that Christ earned (as recorded in the New Testament) and motivation. Our motive is gratitude (our affect is joy!). We seek to please God for Christ's sake *but not for our own sakes—our service is pure worship just as it should be!* Our lives are, as a result of this motivation, reoriented, away from self and towards God—we are becoming other-centered which has always been the plan.

Now, false teachers come along. They afflicted the Galatians and tried to sell them on enhancing their Christianity with some Jewish accessories—special days, special diets, don't touch this, don't do that. Their counterparts today try to guilt you into doing more, to be more Christian! Rubbish. That is why Colossians contains such a ringing exasperation:

Alive in Christ

6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits[a] of the world, and not according to Christ.

And:

Let No One Disqualify You

16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,[a] puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Paul writes that he has accepted Christ through faith alone—that is all that is necessary. And that is the chief distinctive between Christianity and all other religions. When they first heard this, they were overjoyed—treated it as the best news, and Paul as an angel! (Not bad.) And they were so filled with joy—brothers and sisters, we must **keep our joy manifest**. Here Paul clarifies that the law is not of faith—therefore it is useless to salvation, indeed it is a distraction. Our sentence has been revoked and we are as innocent and righteous children before our Heavenly Father. This He has always wanted—ever since the Fall and the coming of Sin into the world. Must man be punished for sin? Well, of course. But as Christians we know that Someone has taken our place, borne our punishment. He came from heaven to bear our punishment and when He had done so returned to heaven to prepare for our appearing as His Bride.

The blessings promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) have come to us through faith in Christ (which is nothing more or less than salvation). We are the children of Abraham because we became the children of God through saving faith (Romans 8:16) And, just when we thought it couldn't get any better, we are told that we receive the promise of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22 and Eph, 1:13-14) as an earnest, a down payment, and advance on the riches of our inheritance which is to come. No other religion is so true, or wonderful . . . **go therefore and make disciples of all nations.**

Amen