

“Picking Up the Thread”
Sermon for 18 September 2016
Texts: Galatians 2:15-21

(pray) I did some research into our preaching program, since January of this year. I note that we journeyed in Galatians up to Chapter 3:5, back in June of 2016—when we took an extended detour into Exodus 20. It seemed good for us to sort out what the Law meant when Paul used it and, consequently, we went through the entire ten commandments and explored what these directives from God, in the setting of His redemptive scheme of things, mean for us today. Now we are ready to pick up the thread of our Galatians’ journey. However, when I went through the sermon archive, I noted that the text for today’s message, Galatians 2:15-21, was not addressed directly. I was astonished at the oversight! And, it is such a pivotal passage that we will take it on.

Paul makes a crucial distinction in verse 15 between **we who are Jews** and everyone else. He separates those who were born under the Law, and therefore, under the ceremonial and ritual constraints that marked Jews as Jews *which the Gentiles were both ignorant of, and aliens to*. By Gentile sinners Paul means those who break the law by virtue of their race and ethnicity. He is not asserting that Gentiles are sinners, and Jews are not **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** (Romans 3:23) Now this distinction is vital because Paul wants the Galatians to know that he, along with all of Jewry, know—yes, **KNOW that a person is not justified by the works of the law.** (v.15) They have tried it and failed at it magnificently. *No one except Jesus has ever kept the law perfectly and it is because Jesus did that His sacrifice on the cross avails for us!* Self-help, self-salvation, self-confidence and even self-reliance—indeed, **all manner of self-direction is folly!** We should note additionally that justification through works, by keeping the law, was never, ever the purpose. The law makes us conscious of sin, the law provides good and useful moral guidance—it serves rather as the railroad bed and rails of the railway of life! It was given in grace as a help—teaching us how to serve God, how to obey God and how to please God. But the law is not the means by which man is made right with God.

“What must I do to be saved?” is right up there with “What must I do to be made right with God?” in terms of urgency and importance. Both assume that something is awfully wrong with our condition that we are powerless to effect—either we are in danger of destruction (as in everlasting condemnation and punishment), or else we are terribly indebted to God for sinning against Him (a debt incurred by infidelity, betrayal and disobedience which could never be paid by any amount of wealth that we might accumulate). Our inability to save ourselves marks either condition. Galatians 2:15-22 is about **justification by faith—or the truth that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.** This is the pivot point of this letter. So the answer to the first question about salvation is, surprisingly, “nothing”; because what needed to be done has been done by the only One who could do it. And the answer to the second question, what must I do to be made right with God? is also Christ dependent.

Next Paul asserts a bond of unity between saved Jews and saved Gentiles: **so also we have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ.** Yes, we are unified in that Christ is our first and last resort—there is no other way but to be made right with God except through Him, **by faith in Christ!**

Now comes the charge, **Is Christ a servant of sin?** (v.17) What is the sin involved here? It is *the sin* of jettisoning the ceremonial law, the rituals and observances of Judaism once one has become convinced that they are nonessential to justification—we are justified by what Christ has done, and by faith in His finished work of atonement on the cross. It is not what we do, but what He has done that matters in the end. Jesus saves! No human effort, nor human merit can be added to faith so as to bring about a better result.

The saga of redemption is divided into three epochs: the first epoch is that of **the promise** which prevailed from the time of Abraham to the giving of the Law at Sinai. The second epoch is the epoch of **the law**, of obedience, which was in place from the giving of the law to the coming of Christ—which ushered in the third and final phase of the epoch of **faith**. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. The thought of going back again, to the time of obedience is repugnant. It is, in essence to nullify the meaning of the cross—the whole process of atonement, of paying off the debt, of righting our accounts with God, of bearing the wrath of God so we don't have to! There is far, far too much at stake here to let it slide, or to minimize the business of the cross.

Now the second emphasis in this passage has to do with the verse: **For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.** (v.19) Acceptance of defeat is life! And by the power of the crucified, risen and indwelling Christ, I now have the ability, both the capacity and the power(!), to live a life freely and completely devoted to God. *This the law was never able to enable and this my own ability was powerless to accomplish.* **Christ who now lives in me impacts the live I now live in the flesh**; but I am a new creature in Christ! Now I live **by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.** It is all of grace because it was not happening through the law, or through my effort, or by my ability—there was only futility and failure in that endeavor. If it were not so, we would be saying that “Christ died for no purpose.” His death was not necessary, or efficacious but cruel, useless and barbaric! There is no other way, neither by the law of the Jews or any other religious path, for *anything* that detracts from the singular necessity of the cross impugns the justice and mercy of our God! *And that is both impossible and unthinkable.* God's plan of redemption is perfect, unimpeachable, irreplaceable and wholly adequate. These things being true it is no wonder that Paul is horrified that anyone, for any reason might turn to another Savior, or another plan—whether than plan be regressive (as it was this case, false teachers urging the saints to revert to works righteousness and obedience to the law) or progressive (as it is with Muslims, Mormons and even, initially at least, Roman Catholicism).

So, let's review what is obtained by faith in the Son of God. Fusion. The dynamic which unlocks me, frees me, is like fusion. It is a new creation brought about by faith. By faith the transforming power of Christ is quickened in me. It is as if I were Lazarus, sick unto death, dead and buried, and at a word Christ calls me out of death *and into life—real life: full, free and forgiven life.* He raises me to be what I have never been before. In this new, spiritual life—this resurrected and spiritual existence brought about by the fusion of His life in me—I have the power to rule over sin! That's new! That's different! By this I mean by the power of the indwelling Christ, by the fusion of His life and my life, I have been loosed from the bondage implicit in my old man, my former self. Paul says:

19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

That is what I mean by this new life, created by fusion (His indwelling nature fused with mine). I am a new creature in Christ; He indwells me, He lives in me. It used to be that my life principle was pursuing my goals, answering my desires—but once the life principle of faith kicks in (through fusion!)—what was formerly mine has become His. The world, the flesh and the Devil have been overthrown, supplanted as it were my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through saving faith. Habitually is overthrown. The dominance of **things that lie behind** (which Paul chooses to forget and cast off!) has been replaced by the things which lie ahead. Anger, bitterness, guilt, shame, resentment, sorrow, loss and *all the negative things (all the devices of fission, the powers of division) have been cast aside—displaced, as it were, by the indwelling power of God. **For now I live by faith, by grace for Him alone.***

Another way to picture this marvelous change is this: baptism is a symbolic re-enactment of all that Christ went through (expressing love for those who were His enemies—namely, us) for our sake. By His death we are emancipated! Yes, we are baptized into His death (only His death could atone for our sins) and, yes, we were buried with Him ***in order to be raised with Him and to live, by fusion with Him, a life beyond the grave.*** Praise God, we have by grace superseded the law as well as escaped the wrath. And we have received an anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle John speaks to this anointing in 1 John 2:27: **The anointing you have received from Him remains in you and you need not anyone to teach you** (either about the reality of God, or your deliverance from sin and death, or the act of fusion which puts God on your inside to transform your outside—meaning by His indwelling your heart is changed from stone to flesh, from rebellion to sweet obedience. You are His now, and not your own anymore). We are talking about the results of fusion. When we are fused with God, the lives we live, we live in faith. However, living in faith is bigger than “faith-ing.” It is more than the exchange of a noun (faith) for a verb (faith-ing). It is more than “mental assent,” more than holding the right and true doctrine (or agreeing with Scripture). And it is more than an act of will (whether you mean “an act of free will,” or an authentic choice, or merely happy submission). ***We are talking about the outcome of a fusion of being—about what happens when His nature, implanted in me, is activated in me and fused with my own nature.*** This is the **new creature** that I am in Christ, or, if you prefer, **the new creation** alluded to in Scripture. Fusion. This faith is our new reality. Faith is my means of living this life and God’s instrument in shaping me to succeed at it—as it were, from the inside out!

When John writes the **anointing remains** he means that the spiritual change to us is *real* and *permanent*. And he offers as proof of this: **We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.** (1 John 4:13) Because we are one in Him, or with, through and by Him, I do ascribe to the idea that the Scripture **What God has joined together, let no man put asunder** applies not only to the marriage union (an unity created by the very Word of God), but also to this vital union of believer to Christ. Paul is asserting that God loves us all the way from gross, unrepentant sin-

ners to the renewed and respectable saints (i.e. Christian folk) that we may, through maturing, eventually become. He loves us through that, and to infinity and beyond! He loves the new born all the way up to the fully grown—yes, all the way up to the mature who attain the highest degrees of completion and perfection (morally and spiritually). He loved us when we were yet sinners (alienated and angry people), yea, even His avowed enemies. No one out loves God, and by what He did for us, we are instructed in how we are to treat those who despise, hate and spitefully use us as servants of the living God. By virtue of His indwelling presence we share His life, first and foremost, then we obtain His nature (in growing measure) and finally, we adopt His values, motives and aspirations. By then we are totally convinced that His power empowers us and that we really are brothers, friends and co-heirs with the Lord Jesus.

It is His life in us that motivates us—not just His example, not even His teachings. I close with noting how intimate and personal this transaction by Him for us is:

He lays down His life for us (John 15:13)

He gives His life as a ransom for us (Mark 10:45)

He gave Himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2)

He gave Himself up for her, the Church (Ephesians 5:25)

He did not do so reluctantly, begrudgingly, or unwillingly but, with joy, hope and great gladness . . . His life was deliberate, purposeful and redemptive—a magnificently grand life! A marvelous and astoundingly loving life! A splendid life! And, mark this, our life. If we revisit the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane briefly, we note that Jesus encouraged Peter to put up his sword because of what the actual tussle was about. He did not say that resistance was futile (after all **I could summon legions of angels**); *what He said is that it is pointless*. He didn't say self-defense was impossible; He said that it was irrelevant *because the fulfillment of Scripture was at stake—the whole work of divine redemption was at stake. The matter of His dying, and the manner of the same, was insignificant compared to all that God was doing moving beyond the promise, and the law to the reign of faith in which all God's redemptive work finds its consummation*. He was about the fulfillment of all things and consummation of all that came before.

Amen.