

“When Faith Becomes Your Identity”

Sermon for 23 October 2016

Texts: Galatians 3:11-14

When faith pervades your personality, is shot through all you are and all you claim to be, every action occurs through faith. Similarly, when Christ indwells the believer, Christ’s own nature fills, permeates that whole person—we are being transformed, from glory unto glory, unto a state of Christlikeness *which is perfected in the age to come, but manifest, even now, in this present age*. So, when you hear the phrase, “Well, nobody’s perfect” . . . it is good to add, “at least not yet!” Perfection, and nothing less, is the goal of Christian sanctification. Psalm 37:27 says: **Depart from evil, and do good.** And, of course, that is precisely what the person of faith, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, does—over and over, and better and better.

There is a double discernment required of us: we must be able to discern what is “evil,” and what “good” is. In the secularized culture, where relativism reigns and godlessness is dominant, we are told there is no “evil” and “good” is merely a matter of preference. And, to complicate things more, “guilt” and “shame” are presented as discomforts—as painful things best treated, or, if possible ignored. This is most problematic! Once evil (and sin) are abolished and “guilt and shame” are repudiated, then, given that there is no god to be accountable to, repentance is pointless—everyone gets to do whatever and everyone gets away with it (not consequences). Wow. This is the essence of the amoral, accidental, secularistic worldview that passes for enlightened thinking, and highly evolved behavior! Now, I said that this is problematic, as I said, before because in such a world there is no need for a Savior, no need for forgiveness, nothing to be saved from (or for) because it is guilt, or shame that notifies us of wrongdoing, and wrongdoing declares our need to repent, make things right, settle our debts and reconcile (both with God and with one another). Jesus saves makes no sense to those who believe nothing matters, that there is nothing wrong—it all just is and we need to adjust, to just get over it.

This is not God’s view of the matter. He says that there is plenty wrong, and He sees that the power of sin, and the strength of our human delusions are such that we were in a pit from which there was no escaping. Not at least without outside assistance. The necessity of a Savior is rooted in the desperation of our lostness. Yes, some of us are so lost we don’t even know what “lost” means! God’s view is that our relationship with Him has been ruptured, totally broken by sin and by the intrusion of evil into His Creation. And when I say totally I mean so broken that we are both helpless and hopeless apart from His intervening mercy. Repeating over and over, there’s nothing to be sorry for because nothing matters, is incoherent and irrational. It’s like reassuring yourself that everything’s okay as a roaring lion is streaking towards you with supper in mind! Or, imagining that walking off a precipice is sane and safe . . . that the law of gravity is only a special conditions kind of natural law. It will be suspended for you because you don’t believe in objective truth, or reality. You see, the effects of gravity are typically benign unless you are falling down, or walking off a cliff. . . and the failure to protect yourself from dangerous

animals is, in the actual situation, a short lived folly. The lion will have you for supper even if he cannot digest your opinions.

So when we come to Gal. 3:13 **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us**, we conclude several things. First that there is something we have been rescued from (a fall, a lion and the folly of our delusional thinking) and that something is **the law**. What is the law but the remedial action of God, a life line, which operates curiously to make us aware that right and wrong are real, that good and evil exists and that it is vital for us to know their reality as well as to avert one and pursue the other! Psalm 37:27 says: **Depart from evil, and do good**. God declares that He owns us, that the moral imperative is inescapable—the universe is not morally neutral and we are moral beings (responsible, accountable and, due to our disability, in trouble both with Him and each other). **The law teaches us how we ought to live and the great difficulty is that we cannot do it.**

Why would God create us for a life of frustration? Well, the answer is that God created everything for the purpose of demonstrating His great mercy and love. He did what He did to reveal His glorious redeeming nature—and so, willingly to save, those incapable of saving themselves. And that purpose, that redeeming love, is fulfilled by Christ alone, through Christ alone—and we benefit from that act of love: ***I cannot be saved except by the blood and death—and the resurrection power of Jesus Christ which comes to me through the Holy Spirit when I receive Christ by faith. . . and by faith I can do what is expected of me, demanded of me. Faith enables the keeping of the law—indeed it is the keeping of the law.*** If Christ does not cover my sins, they are not covered. The Law couldn't, my own efforts couldn't . . . *“nothing but the blood of Jesus!”* Jesus is the price of my redemption, Jesus was made sin for my justification, His death atones for it all: **But that no man is justified by law in the sight of God, it is evident, for the just shall live by faith.** (v.11)

So, we have these two principles laid out for us: **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us** and **the just shall live by faith**. Guilt is not the enemy, shame is not the problem, sin is the problem. We do not need to deny guilty, or avert shame because Christ, in His mercy, has dealt with the guilt (He atoned for our sins and made payment for our sins—they are forgiven) and He has taken our shame upon Himself (He bore it for it, making it His not ours anymore). When we affirm that **the just shall live by faith**, we have laid out remedy and treatment—no one needs pills, drugs or palliative behaviors . . . no one needs therapy, counseling fees, or a psychiatrist to deal with guilt and shame. These things, and these treatments cannot do for us what only the Son of God could do, did do, and still does for those who put their trust fully in Him!

When faith becomes yours identity, these old things pass away. All things are made new and you are forgiven, free, guiltless and unashamed. What a benefit plan! What a Savior! **Matt. 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

Amen.