**Galatians: Paul’s Letter of Freedom**

**Sunday September 30, 2018**

**“One in Christ” (Galatians 3:19-29)**

**1. Introduction: *A Profound Sense of Belonging***

A.J. Jacobs, author of such books as *The Know-It-All* and *The Year of Living Biblically,* has written a new book entitled, *It’s All Relative.* In this book Jacobs explores our culture’s current interest in *genealogy -* discovering your family’s roots through archival research or genetic testing. In this book he enthusiastically shares in the human quest for self-knowledge that drives so many of us around the world to search for – and find – our roots. So, he had two main goals for this writing project: to explore the idea that we all are connected, that is, we all are part of one big global family tree; and to learn about his family history so that he could pass this information on to his children. The genesis of the book was “one of the strangest emails” that he had ever received. Imagine getting an email that starts with these words, “You don’t know me, but you are an eighth cousin of my wife, who, in my opinion, is a fine lady.” The email was from Jules Feldman, an Israeli dairy farmer, whose life project was the construction of a massive family tree. At the time he sent this email to Jacobs, he had a database of a staggering *80,000 relatives.* The news that Jacobs had over 80,000 relatives gave him mixed feelings. On the one hand, he felt that his weird and wonderful family was enough to handle already and he didn’t need more branches on his family tree. Yet he goes on to write these words:

 “On the other hand, the less cynical hand, I’m oddly moved. Here I am, sitting in my home office in New York City, subjected to endless Internet headlines about our world’s seeming descent into disaster—wars, racism—and up pops this startling news about how I’m connected to thousands of other humans across the globe. These newfound cousins would likely come in all shapes, sizes, and ethnic backgrounds: tall cousins and short cousins, white cousins and black cousins, carnivorous cousins and vegan cousins, gay cousins and straight cousins, cilantro-loving cousins and cousins who believe cilantro tastes like Satan’s unwashed tube socks.

All of us different, all of us linked.

What I’m trying to say is that I experienced a profound sense of belonging. I felt a part of something larger than myself. I glimpsed the Ultimate Social Network” (Jacobs, *It’s All Relative,* p. 2).

 A central idea in Jacobs’ book is the profound connectedness of all humans and he hopes that is reality will encourage all of us to abandon our tribalistic tendencies, that is, our inclination to remain within our cliques and to insulate ourselves from others who are different. If we have the realization that human race is *one big family*, we’d be less likely to respond to others out of fear, prejudice, hatred or anger. It’s a message that needs to be heard, especially today in a world that grapples with human migration, racial prejudice, religious intolerance and gender-based tensions.

The message that we are *one big family* is a hopeful and optimistic vision for a world that seems bent on exclusion rather than embrace. In the midst of the conflict in Galatia and the thorny issue of the role of the Mosaic law in the lives of Gentile Christians, the apostle Paul argued that Jews and Gentiles were part of *one big family*, issuing this grand declaration:

“*For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.* *As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* *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*” (Galatians 3:26-28).

All of us different, all of us linked.

**2. The (Limited) Role of the Law (3:19-25)**

But before Paul gets on to his grand proclamation in Galatians 3:28, he must first address some lingering questions about the Mosaic law. Paul’s central proposition in the letter to the Galatians is that people are *justified*, that is, pardoned and accepted by God, based on Christ’s atoning work on the cross and their response of faith in Christ. It is not, he emphatically states, on the basis of doing the works of the law or any other human endeavour (2:16). In his defense of this truth, Paul focuses on God’s covenant with Abraham, stressing God’s intent to bless the nations through Abraham and Abraham’s response of faith (3:6-9). While the Abrahamic covenant brings blessing, the Mosaic law brought a curse, from which Christ redeemed humanity through his death on the cross (3:10-14). For Paul, *God’s covenant* with Abraham is central to his redemptive purposes in the world, making Jesus Christ the *climax of the covenant* (3:14-16)*.*

 So, Paul’s critique of legalism, which places *covenant, faith, promise* and *blessing* on one side and *law, works of the law* and *a curse* on the other, would naturally lead one to ask, “Why, then, *was the law given at all*?” (Galatians 3:19). In response, Paul lays out a Christian understanding of the purpose and function of the Mosaic law with respect to the Judaizers’ argument for its enduring role in the lives of God’s people. His answer here cannot be treated as a comprehensive one that discusses every aspect of the law. At the same time, Paul’s response to the situation in Galatia is vitally important for Christians today as we address similar questions regarding the role of the Old Testament law in the Christian life.

 Paul’s discussion of the law demands a lot of unpacking, but the real focus of my reflections this morning is on Paul’s remarks in verses 26-29, so I will be brief in my explanation here. In a nutshell, Paul stresses that the law had a particular purpose for a limited time. Verse 19 sums this up nicely, “*It (the law) was given to show people how guilty they are. But this system of law was to last only until the coming of the child (Christ) to whom God’s promise was made*.” The law was *added* because of human sinfulness, but instead of restraining sin, it provoked and exacerbated sin. The Mosaic law *defined* sin (Romans 4:15) and it also *increased* sin (Romans 5:20) as humanity, in its rebelliousness, crossed the line drawn in the sand. The law showed people their sins but it also demonstrated that the law could not curb sin, paving the way for God to reveal that the only answer to the power of sin is Jesus the Messiah. Paul is clear - the law could not give people the new life of the Spirit, neither could it make them right with God (Galatians 3:21), only faith in Christ could achieve these goals (3:24). The law, then, brings us down so that we might by faith look up and grasp the hand of Christ.

 To illustrate his point, Paul likens the law to a *guardian*, *tutor* or *pedagogue* (Greek – παιδαγωγός) (Galatians 3:23-25). In Greco-Roman society pedagogues were servants who were charged with keeping watch over the *children* of the household until they reached maturity. These guardians would teach the children morals and manners, discipline them and supervise their daily activities, but this task would cease when the children reached adulthood. So this analogy suggests that as a guardian keeps watch over a child until the child reaches maturity, so the law guarded humanity until the coming of Christ. Eugene Peterson’s translation of this passage does of great job of vividly expressing Paul’s analogy:

“Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for. But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God” (Galatians 3:23-26, *The Message*).

**3. Children of God through Faith in Christ (3:26-29)**

Through our faith in Christ, we have arrived at our destination and no longer need the law as our pedagogue. *In Christ* we have a direct relationship with God our Father. Together, we are his sons and daughters. *We are family!* Again, Paul stresses that this new reality is not through the Mosaic law but *through faith in Christ*. So, look around this sanctuary and be filled with a profound sense of belonging.

 Interestingly enough, New Testament scholar, Richard Longenecker thinks that Paul’s words here were used in the early church during baptisms. So, it’s very fitting that we’re reflecting on these words today as we celebrate Duncan’s baptism. For Paul’s Gentile readers, the repetition of the baptismal liturgy would have been a power reminder of their new life in Christ. It was a wonderful re-affirmation that on the basis of Christ’s finished work on the cross, they were pardoned, forgiven and accepted by God. As they took that step of faith and trusted in Christ, they entered into a deeply personal relationship with Christ. And they were members of God’s family through faith alone. So, they didn’t need to heed the Judaizers’ message and add the works of the law to their spiritual to-do list. Instead, they needed to remember the words spoken at their baptisms.

“*For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**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*” (Galatians 3:26-28).

 These powerful words still ring true for us here at Donway Baptist. We are not merely linked together because we share a common ancestry and belong to a global family tree. Our belonging is far deeper because we are “*in Christ.*” If we really regarded each other as family, as sisters and brother in Christ, we’d be less likely to complain about each other, hold grudges toward each other, feel threatened by each other, or feel inferior to each other. By faith, we all belong at the Father’s table, sisters and brothers sitting side-by-side.

This morning, Duncan shared the story of his faith in Christ. His baptism was the outward and visible expression of that new relationship established by his faith in Christ. Baptism is a beautiful and visual expression of this new life in Christ. Going under the water marks a radical break with the old life and rising up from the water signifies the beginning of a brand new life. It is a life that is characterized by Christlikeness. Paul’s metaphor of clothing oneself in Christ signifies the taking on the character, virtues and mission of Christ. As witnesses of Duncan’s baptism, his public proclamation of his new life in Christ, we are all invited to pray for, encourage and support him as he seeks to follow Jesus. He is, after all, family!

And the most wonderful thing about this family is that the old divisions that plague our world should not exist here. We are one in Christ, regardless of race, social status or gender. In the words of Eugene Peterson:

“As a son or daughter in Christ all these differences of race (Greek and Jew), of status (slave and free), of sex (male and female) which provoke envy and make enemies are subordinated to the central, common relationship which we have in Christ. Now all those basic harmonies and continuities in which we are created can be experience and developed. We are free in relationship to each other, discovering an equal acceptance. Other persons are not enemies to fear, not superior beings to envy, not deadbeats to avoid. In Christ every person is or can be experienced in a new way, a person we are free to receive and love without fear of being diminished or intimidated” (Peterson, *Travelling Light,* pp. 114-115).

In Christ, all of us different, all of us equal, all of us linked. *We are family!*