

June 19, 2022

Galatians 3:23-29

“Daddy’s Home”

Jesus taught us to understand God in terms of family who love us. We begin the Lord’s prayer, *“Our father – who art in heaven.”* It is a positive and relational image. Yet, the image of “Father” awakens different responses in different people. Not all fathers are the same and not all fathers are good. There *are* benefits to describing God using language we can understand – but it may come with drawbacks.

The backbone of religious life when Jesus was born was *the law*. God was kind enough not to leave us on our own to repeat self-defeating patterns over and over again. So, the set of rules at the heart of “the law” was given as a means of *helping us live life well by staying near to the purposes of God*. Which meant – no worshipping other Gods – no stealing – no adultery and so on.

The challenge, of course, is that when you tell *a human* what not to do – *it is really all we want to do*. “Don’t touch -wet paint”. Is it really? I bet its dry by now! Which means, while it was good to have some structure and discipline, we weren’t very good at benefiting from it.

Most people have at one time or another either heard or said the phrase, ***“You wait until your father gets home!”*** Not really the kind of *press* dads are looking for. Not really the kind of *dad* kids were hoping for. The role of disciplinarian for mom or dad is important – but can also get in the way of relationship if it is all there is to the relationship.

Which is why the law which is meant to help us can lead us to simply *resent the one who gave it or enforces it*. I suspect the number of drivers who *adhere painstakingly* to the posted speed limits is very few. And it is rare for a driver who has been given a speeding ticket to thank the officer profusely for enforcing the law. Paul would not be surprised. *Structure which hangs on rules alone always runs into trouble*. That’s why we have lawyers and court systems...because we can’t agree at times either *what* the rules are, *who* should follow them or *how* they should be enforced.

The good news of God, Paul tells us today, is that Jesus has changed everything. ***We now live in the matrix of relationship.*** We now belong to God *through faith*. Our most important path in life is *not managing legalities but relationships*. This stands in contrast to using the rules against others – or comparing ourselves to others. “*At least I don’t do what they do,*” for example.

Putting on Christ brings us together. It does not give us an upper hand and *make us superior to our neighbor*. The categories Paul uses here were extreme in his time. They don’t push our buttons, but they would have shocked the people living in Galatia and beyond. There is no longer, Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free – all are one in Christ.

How can we translate that into more recognizable terms? Perhaps: Neither black nor white? Liberal nor conservative? Lions nor Bears? UofM nor MSU? In West Michigan we might say, “Hope nor Calvin”.

These categories by which we define ourselves – “I am this not that” are the *spiritual descendants of defining by rules* and we have been redeemed by Christ **to do better**. Our identity is ***determined by the spiritual family*** to which we belong. In this spiritual family we don’t have to wait for our father to get home and we don’t have to fear we will be punished or unloved.

The whole reason we have this passage is because the people in Galatia had fallen under the spell of those who told them *they had to tow the line of the Jewish law*. And today there will still be people and groups who are sure that *towing a certain line is essential* to please God who will be unhappy with us otherwise. Paul seeks to ease our worry and set our lack of confidence aside. ***What matters is that in Christ God has made a new creation.*** We live in that creation because we belong to God – not because we have avoided making an unforgivable mistake. (Which does not exist)

Do not be afraid – God in Christ has made sure we are more than the sum of our worst mistakes. Let’s stop beating ourselves up because we know we aren’t perfect. Let’s stop looking for people we can imagine are worse than us to feel better about ourselves. Let’s remember forever and for always – whether we are feeling joyful or sad – there is new life to be had in the new creation of God which Christ has brought and made us. It is good news to know – our daddy’s home.