

**GOD'S LIBERATING LOVE—In Christ—Leaving Behind Our Us-Them Ways
Galatians 3:23-29**

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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/in-christ-leaving-behind-our-us-them-ways/>

Last month, attending the Baptist World Alliance Gathering in Zurich, Switzerland, we worshipped in the Grossmunster Church, where the Reformer Zwingli pastored and translated the Bible, almost 500 years ago. There we were, believers from 50 countries, in an Evangelical Reformed (Lutheran) church, singing “What A Friend We Have in Jesus.” The Cross of Christ unites us across language, culture, politics and across the centuries.

In v. 26, Paul says that in Christ, we are ALL children of God through faith. In the Greek language, sentence structure and word order were fluid. You could put at the front of the sentence the word you want to emphasize. Paul begins the sentence with the word ALL. Not some. All.

In v. 27, he talks about being baptized into Christ. Baptism is that act of obedience which shows we belong to Christ. Paul says it is our initiation ceremony, placing us all in a new a new humanity, on equal footing with one another. If we are equal in Christ, we are also all free. And that freedom is fragile, always in jeopardy. Eugene Peterson writes, “When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others.” [*The Message*, introduction to Galatians].

How quickly our ego takes over and we begin to believe we are superior to others! Sin manifests itself in the way we exploit and manipulate others. Like Paul (Saul of Tarsus) before his conversion, we suddenly want to control others and think we know what’s best for them (1:13-14). Nadia Bolz-Weber once said in a podcast interview that the two mistakes made by fundamentalists (on the Right or Left) are that they have no joy and they have no humility [Preachers on Preaching]. Here is a psychological insight which I think Galatians bears out: The less sure I am of my own relationship with Christ, the more I need to control others. To give up our compulsion to make everyone just like us, we have to be very secure in our own relationship with Christ (“in Christ”, vv. 26-27).

And this freedom in Christ has political and global implications. Chister Daelander is a church leader in Sweden who works tirelessly for religious liberty. He asserts that the Gospel of Christ is a gospel of liberation, setting us free in our spirits, our bodies and in our socio-economic realm [*Word and Way*, August, 2018, p. 18]. Missionaries and those who have shared the gospel in other cultures tell us that there is something about the liberating Word of Christ which brings the fresh air of life’s possibilities. Where the gospel is preached (at its best), fertile ideas grow. It gives birth to equality, civil rights, democracy and education [*Christianity Rediscovered* by Vincent Donovan, p. 128].

In Christ, those previous distinctions don't count anymore. The only identity that matters is "in Christ." Look carefully at v. 28. There are three distinctions which don't count anymore: 1) Ethnic-religious-racial differences are not our ultimate identity. Christ is! 2) Socio-economic differences are not are not our ultimate identity. Christ is! 3) Gender differences are not our ultimate identity. Christ is! Guess why Paul uses this particular order. Most Bible scholars believe it's because a prayer which Jewish men prayed was as follows: "I thank God that he has not made me a Gentile, a slave or a woman!"

When we make distinctions God does not make, when we make distinctions the Cross and the gospel do not make, we make a joke of the gospel. I once had some yellow-tinted sunglasses. They made the whole world look strange, like mustard! How dangerous of us when we read the gospel with our social-racial bias glasses or our political bias glasses instead of reading our biases with gospel glasses! By the way, do you know how the KKK got its name? From the Greek word for circle, *kuklos*. Drawing a circle to exclude others.

And that reminds me of this great poem by Edwin Markham: "He drew a circle that shut me out-/Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout./But Love and I had the wit to win:/We drew a circle that took him in" [from the poem, "Outwitted"]. In Christ, our highest identity!