

The family of Christ is a gift to all sons and daughters of God.

“But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.

27 For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. 28 There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.” -- **Galatians 3:25-29** (CSB)

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As we have been unpacking boxes in our new home, and continue to downsize, I have spent some time mentally unpacking the last 18 months and going through the elements of the experience that brought the most stress and discontent and the things that brought the most joy and contentment.

Among my ‘no bueno’ list is the craze of encampment in our country and sadly in the church. Determining to be rigidly defined as a member of a group determined by ways of thinking, politics, persuasions and everything else. It seems as if there is a loss of a unifying center, a commonality for us.

In the church it is devastating, and I suppose I have been a contributor as much as others. It often comes out in the refrain “real Christians do X.” I hate that phrase. Because real Christians are defined by something more important than their politics, perspectives on vaccines, their race or experience.

But it is a natural phenomenon. Defining boundaries to make us feel affirmed and creating borders within which we can belong. Belonging, that is what we get wrong I suppose.

“Belonging is, of course, that feeling of connectedness to a group or community. It’s the sense that you’re part of something. You feel attached, close and thoroughly accepted by your people. But belonging is more than just being part of a group. Belonging is also critically tied to social identity—a set of shared beliefs or ideals. To truly feel a sense of belonging, you must feel unity and a common

sense of character with and among members of your group.” **Tracy Bower**, Sociologist in Forbes.

“Belonging is a fundamental part of being human: We need people and this need is hardwired into our brains. A recent MIT study found we crave interactions in the same region of our brains where we crave food, and another study showed we experience social exclusion in the same region of our brain where we experience physical pain.”

We need, and were made for a people to belong to. That group might not be what we think it is. But in Christ we have them, if we receive them. That is what Paul highlights in these few vital verses of Galatians 3.

We are well-versed in the drama of the Galatian churches that necessitated this letter. Paul had planted many of these churches, preaching the good news of Jesus, and many Gentiles believed. In quarters where Jews remained opposed to Christ, people with no religious experience or pedigree other than paganism were trusting in Jesus for salvation, they were baptized declaring their faith publicly.

As the gospel was going forth walls were coming down. Groups of people that used to avoid each other, even hate each other, were calling one another brother and sister, they would eat together, pray together... they were living under a new definition of community in the Kingdom of Christ. Glorious.

Yet some snakes made their way through the churches. Hailing from Jerusalem, the churches assumed they had some spiritual authority. But they were teaching that to be a “real Christian” gentile believers would need to submit to elements of the law as if it was the basis of salvation.

They were, as would happen in other churches, trying to establish rankings of superior Christians, giving exclusive rights of belonging to those that obeyed their false teaching.

Preaching the same gospel they first believed, Paul draws the churches back into the truth. And in doing so we learn much about our identity in Christ and the family we now belong to.

But we start with the mess we have made...

We Have Corrupted What Was Good

Humanity, throughout history has focused on difference in order to divide and it is a result of a curse.

God created, creation flourished. Sin entered the garden and things went askew. Humanity multiplied but was always running after the dream of being gods ourselves.

“The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary.² As people migrated from the east, they found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ They said to each other, “Come, let’s make oven-fired bricks.” (They used brick for stone and asphalt for mortar.) ⁴ And they said, “Come, let’s build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let’s make a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered throughout the earth.”

“⁵ Then the Lord came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building. ⁶ The Lord said, “If they have begun to do this as one people all having the same language, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let’s go down there and confuse their language so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸ So from there the Lord scattered them throughout the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ Therefore it is called Babylon, for there the Lord confused the language of the whole earth, and from there the Lord scattered them throughout the earth.” -- Genesis 11:1-9 (CSB)

Because humanity tainted by sin runs after attempts to reject God by being a god ourselves, difference enters the human story and it unfolds in the ugliest ways throughout history.

In redemptive history, Israel would often stumble along confused how their uniqueness didn’t give them the right to mistreat outsiders. Even after Pentecost and the reversal of Babel, in the church, there would be a constant struggle to avoid classification of followers of Jesus. In Corinth it was the super spiritual that experienced manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, others were less than. In Galatia it was Jewish believers that were closer to God.

In James, the dangers of partiality are warned against. We just can’t help ourselves and all of these things go on today.

In the world, difference being highlighted has brought oppression, war, distrust and exploitation. Even with an arc toward justice and freedom - in a land meant to be a melting pot we have a new found and absurd confidence in expressing prejudice against those different than us.

All because we want to belong. A desire for belonging will drive us to do some crazy things. How many times do we have to hear that Sunday at ten am is the most segregated hour in our nation?

Humanity is meant for more, and that is coming. The church is meant for more, now. Yet we can so often wallow in the muck... It is the muck the Galatian Christians are entrapped by, and the muck that spews out of so much of our media today.

There is a solution. It starts with the individual and then is experienced in a new place of belonging.

Jesus Gives Us Our Identity

This is a message from Scripture for those that believe in Jesus.

“For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ.”
-- **Galatians 3:27** (CSB)

Paul has gone on about what matters in salvation - faith in Jesus. It is the fruit of an ancient promise and it is for all who believe. That's how you are brought into the Kingdom.

And here there is fruit of this salvation. Newness. Identity.

For those baptized - immersion in water, symbolically dying with Christ through water and being raised to new life in Him. For these first Christians it was how they identified with Christ. Baptizo - in essence the same as dying wool, the raw material is immersed in indigo and comes out transformed, now blue forever.

That is what it is for believers. A declaration of newness of life in Jesus.

The identity is taken from something else, from Jesus. You receive a new identity, you don't take it.

Where other categories or descriptors clammer for priority - followers of Jesus receive a defining identity in Christ.

Confronting the lure to sin more to get more grace in Romans, Paul calls us to this new identity.

“Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection.” -- **Romans 6:3-5** (CSB)

This identity brings with it transformation. We are those “clothed with Christ.”

To the church in Colossae Paul would implore them to live from their identity as Christians.

“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator. 11 In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.” -- **Colossians 3:9-11** (CSB)

Putting on a new self, being clothed with Christ. It is not just a ticket to heaven you get when you believe in Jesus, it is a spiritual makeover.

I like to think of it like the robes at a swanky hotel. Ever been to a four star hotel? Maybe one or twice in my life, on someone else's dime! But the best hotels have the softest, warm, clean robes in the rooms. When you put it on at first it is a different experience but the longer you wear the robe the more it feels like home. Every day a spa day!

This is our wardrobe in Christ. At first the clothes feel foreign, but staying rooted in our identity we are increasingly transformed and long to be more like Jesus.

In fact that is why we are called Christians in the first place. In Antioch they had all these believers that lived like Jesus and called them “little Christs.”

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” -- **2 Corinthians 5:17** (CSB)

“Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God”. -- **Ephesians 5:1-2** (CSB)

“The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked.” -- **1 John 2:6** (CSB)

And this transformation, sanctification, is a promise like salvation, it comes. Maybe slowly but the Spirit is at work transforming us into the likeness of Jesus.

Not only do we gain a new identity in Christ, we gain a place of belonging.

Jesus Gives Us a New Family

“There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.” -- **Galatians 3:28-29** (CSB)

Where the false teachers said there was distinction within the church, Paul says, nope, you are all one in Christ. Distinctions hold no weight in Christ’s kingdom.

"Baptized Christians are incorporated into a community in which each member has put on a kind of clothing that covers differences that normally divide people, such as gender, ethnicity, and social status. On the basis of faith, by which anyone can be united to Christ, all Christians are included regardless of such apparent differences." GTB

It is not a loss of these secondary things of identity but how the primacy of our identity in Christ redefines us.

The Kingdom of Christ is a mosaic of difference shaped into beauty. The unifying work of the gospel not robbing us of experience or existence but highlighting it for the glory of Jesus. It is the image that is painted throughout Scripture.

Citizen status gained by the work of Jesus not our ability to shed what makes us different. But to be ourselves, made clean and part of the family by his blood.

The equality and unity spoken of here is of a spiritual nature - in Christ. Paul had just discussed at length that the Jew has no spiritual advantage over the Greek (Gentile), and now he says the same equality is true for social and gender distinctions. No people group or gender is to be exalted above others.

“God doesn’t have favorite children...How freeing it is to discover that! Other people then are no longer a threat to our security or our chances of being recognized and loved. We are not rivals competing for a prize, but participants in common life, brothers and sister in a single family. We are free to accept, even glory in, our diversity.” **Eugene Peterson**

All one. Unified in Christ. Identity no longer gets in the way but is now what binds us together. All little Christs, a new family to care for us, to protect us, to challenge us, to refine us.

Not just cousins, but brothers and sisters made Abraham’s seed, heir according to the promise. Royalty by faith in Jesus.

Our place to belong - “if you belong to Christ.”

It is a beautiful picture of the Kingdom - all these *differents* brought together and made family by the work of Christ and our new identity in Him. It defies worldly sensibilities. It enriches our lives. It brightens the tapestry of our experience.

The church began when the Spirit moved and people of vast difference, language, ethnicity, experience, all heard the news of Jesus clearly. And the church that strives to be a collection of the homogeneous, those of the same exclusive ethnicity, the same socio-economic experience, the same political perspective; that church becomes an affront to the gospel and the kingdom of Christ. It misses the physical and spiritual reality of the church now and in the future.

“After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

Salvation belongs to our God,

who is seated on the throne,

and to the Lamb!” -- **Revelation 7:9-10** (CSB)

“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 experienced and developed. We are free in relationship to each other, discovering an equal acceptance. Other people 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.” **Eugene Peterson**

As we have been defining our values as a church this reality is key. *The three*: “Rescued by Jesus” Salvation by faith in Him. “Formed into family.” Not just a club but a real place of lasting belonging. “For the renewal of others and all things.” On Christ’s mission to bring redemption everywhere we are.

These values are all here, it is glorious!

Worn down sinners made Children and given a family. Our adoption in Christ experienced in the church.

“He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace that he lavished on us in the Beloved One.” -- **Ephesians 1:5-6** (CSB)

Pundits might say “real Christians do x” But Paul says real Christians are freed and made family.

I can't help but see our adoption experience as an illustration of this. We love adoption - we will help you do it when you are ready! But the fruit of our adoption is that Adia is a Shradar. She is fully part of the family. Same rights and privileges as all the other Shradars.

I will fight someone if they say she isn't a real Shradar. She is because the father (me) says so.

It is the same in Christ. You are child of God because the Father has said so. We are adopted in Christ, identified with him, given a new identity, transformed by his Spirit, and given a new family to glorify him with until he returns.

What a gift that is for us! Relationships to go on our faith journey together, to refine one another, to serve one another, to experience Christ in community. Genuine, blood-bought, authentic community as a family!

The family of Christ is a gift to all sons and daughters of God.

Brothers and sisters - **make this identity central**, the most important thing about you. No one can take from you what Jesus has given you. Their attempts at classification and division won't work. You are in Christ, clothed in him!

Enjoy the family - invest, stick around, be together, play together, cry together, learn each other and point one another to Jesus and his grace for us. Become a member!

What a gift to be baptized into Christ - transformed by him and given a new family. Belonging realized, healthy, worthwhile and for our flourishing. Let others see how glorious it is. That the Lord would add brothers and sisters for his glory.