

Identity Crisis

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[0 : 00] If you would, turn with me to Galatians 3. We are going to read verses 26-29. If you would, stand with me as we read God's word together.

Start at verse 26. For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring. Heirs according to the promise. Let me pray real quick before we jump in. Father God, we just ask this afternoon, Lord, that your spirit would be here.

God, in this room. God, among this body of believers, Lord, that God, your call for us to know you and to know your word, Lord. And to make your word known to the world around us.

[1 : 10] God, that it would spur in our hearts. God, a deep desire. God, as we comprehend the beauty of who you are, that we would just want to make that known to the world around us.

So, God, I ask that you speak through me today and through your word. I ask that this body of believers would be edified through this afternoon and this time being together. We pray these things in your son's name.

Amen. I can imagine as this letter to the Galatians was about to be read in front of the church, that there probably would have been a buzz around the room in anticipation to hear this letter from Paul. And in a room that was most likely filled with men, women, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks, free men and slaves at that time.

When the words were read, there is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free. There is no male or female. Well, I can imagine the room would probably immediately have gotten very quiet.

[2 : 18] The sentence that was penned by Paul would have been most likely extremely shocking and jolting for the people in that church at that time. My guess is that was Paul's intent.

If you look at the rest of Galatians, he uses very strong language as he's talking to the church. And he probably meant to have this effect because this very young Galatian church was facing an identity crisis.

This very young church was facing an identity crisis. The church was made up of two very different worlds. Two very different worlds that had different cultural backgrounds, practices, worldviews. And only a few years before this was written, both of these worlds had collided and come together in this new community under the name of Jesus.

And on top of that, this new community was living in the midst of a very confused world. A very confused world. On one side in this church, the camp of the Gentiles, they were coming from a worldview and a culture that was extremely immoral.

[3 : 33] During the Greco-Roman world, it was really the center of the world. So there were so many religions, ideas that were floating through that area. And so the only real religion that people believed in was that, not that there was right and wrong, but that there were things that were shameful or things that brought you honor.

And as long as you didn't disturb the peace in the Roman world, you're fine. You can believe whatever you want. And so there was rampant immorality, sexual immorality, all types of hedonism going on from this Gentile world that they were coming from, to the point of being a normal practice for a married man to have mistresses or to be unfaithful.

And while if the wife or the spouse did the same thing, they would be severely punished. And so the elites had this kind of normalcy of infidelity.

And that would have actually been something that was honorable. That would have been something that showed that you were an elite in that society. And so this was the Gentile world, and it was made up of lots of slaves and bond servants.

And so the poor people in that time would bring themselves into, they call it indentured servitude, where they would basically offer themselves up to a master to work for them until they could get money to be able to provide for their family.

[4 : 52] And this was very common in that time. And on top of that, and all these different things that were going on in this Gentile world, there's a very, very strong tension with the Jewish population at this time.

A very strong tension. The Gentiles saw the Jews as lazy because they didn't work on the seventh day. They saw the Jews as not progressive and really stuck in the old ways.

That they held to only one God, which to them brought a lot of shame. That you would be so close-minded to only believe in one God. And they knew the way that the Jews felt about the Gentiles.

Because if you went to a temple or a synagogue, the outer wall was where the Gentiles could go. But there was a sign actually posted that said, If Gentiles pass here, they would be under the threat of death.

And so the Gentiles knew very well how the Jews felt about them in this period of time. And so the believers in this church that were Gentiles were coming from this background. And then they were mixing and colliding together with the people coming from a Jewish background.

[6 : 01] So the Jewish people, they saw the Gentiles really as their oppressors. That they were longing and had been longing for freedom from this exile. And these Gentiles peoples who they saw as barbarians, as immoral, as living in the passions of their flesh.

And having all these barbaric evil practices. They saw them as impure and as their oppressors. And they wanted to be free from them. So what you have in this Galatian church is these two worlds colliding.

And what's happening in this time and place of this Galatian church is that as this new community was forming, on one side, the Gentiles were feeling this pressure of everything you're doing is shameful.

That you being a part of this one religion and mixing with Jews, this is shameful. And then the Jews, they were now feeling a pressure from this new group of people called the Judaizers.

Who are saying what it really means to follow Jesus is you have to be a Jew. You have to be circumcised. You have to follow all these Jewish laws. And these Gentiles people are saying no.

[7 : 12] They're saying get rid of it. And that's wrong. And you need to become a Jew to really follow Jesus. And so Paul, as he's hearing these things and these reports coming of what is going on in this Galatian church early as it was forming, would have wanted to have a very commanding, commanding voice in his letter.

And what he would have realized is that this people in this church, they were asking the question, so who are we? If we're feeling this pressure from the Gentile world and from these Judaizers telling us who we are, who are we?

They were clearly facing an identity crisis. And so, like I said, as Paul is hearing these reports, and as he sits down to write this letter, I'm sure the question that is going through his mind that he's asking himself is what am I going to say to break through all these generations and centuries of cultural backgrounds and practices and biases and prejudices and confusion to unite this church together as one new community?

As often as Paul does in his letters, he reminds them of the gospel. This is his solution.

And over and over and over again, you'll see through his letters, as he faces these things, he brings them back to the gospel. And he reminds them that the gospel has the power to not only tear down the false identities that are plaguing the world around them, but it's the gospel that has the power to give them a new identity, a much more glorious identity.

[9 : 03] When he writes, there's no Jew or Greek, there's no slave or free, there's no man or woman, he's tearing down all of these false identities that are being brought in from all these outside influences, these outside voices that are coming.

And he's reminding them that both of them, man and woman, slave and free, Jew and Greek, both are equally for Jesus had loved their sin and had hated God, that both the Jew and the Greek.

He's reminding them that both men and woman had mocked Jesus, that both slave and free had spat on him on the way to the cross, that it was the Jews who cried out for him to be crucified, and the Roman Gentiles who had nailed him to the cross.

And even if you look back in chapter 3, verse 2, he tells them it was before their very eyes, this church, before their eyes that Jesus was crucified. They were there. They saw it happen.

They saw what was done to Jesus. And so they all equally, in the same way, had been enslaved to the power of darkness. And what Paul is telling them is that there may be voices that are coming in from the outside, in the culture and the people around you, these Judaizers, that are trying to tell you what your identities and who you should be.

[10:27] But Paul is saying, what I'm proclaiming to you is that is not who you are. That is no longer who you are. So who are they? He goes on in the same sentence, and he writes, you are all one in Christ.

And if you are Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. When he's saying in this sentence, he's reminding them that the power of the gospel gives them this new identity.

It tears down all these false identities that are coming in, and it gives them a new one. He reminds them that even though they were equally all under the power of sin before Christ, but now that Christ has come, they equally are his.

That they equally are Christ's. That they are Abraham's offspring. This idea of being Abraham's offspring, this language, refers to the idea of being sons and daughters of God, which in that time, that would mean royalty.

That would mean kings and queens. So he's saying you are kings and queens. That you are going to rule with Christ. And not only that, but you are heirs, which means heirs meant you were receiving the inheritance.

[11:42] And at that time, an inheritance meant land. And land signified your family blessing being passed down from generation to generation. So God was saying, you are going to be inheriting the redeemed world with Christ.

This is who you are. You are heirs with Jesus. Paul is saying that together, this new identity is so much more glorious than anything these people around you are going to be telling you.

So much more glorious. Who you are in Christ is so much better. Because Christ is better. And there's hope in him. And this is why Paul reminds them of the gospel.

Because the gospel triumphantly gives answers to their identity crisis. Because it's only the gospel that can proclaim who they really are. Only the gospel can proclaim who they really are.

And they are Christ's. I was reading recently that in the 21st century that we live in today, that this century is the most similar in the culture to the first century than any century in between.

[12:55] The world we live in now is the closest to that first century than any century in between. And I think as we look around the world today, we too live in a very confused world.

We live in a very confused world. A culture that is facing an identity crisis. I had a conversation in the lunchroom at the University of IUPUI with a student who was in the LGBTQ community.

He was talking about how he was a homosexual and what life was like in that way. And as I was telling him about what I did as a Christian minister, he stopped me and he said, Greg, I actually got a question for you.

I was like, okay, go ahead. And he said, why can't Christians just let me be who I am? And I paused and I replied, okay, well, who do you think that you are?

And he said, well, I'm gay. And then I replied and I said, so you're telling me that the whole of your existence, of your meaning, of your purpose in life, all of that is wrapped around your sexual preference.

[14:21] And he sat back and he's like, well, no. And I asked, well, who are you then? And I could see the confusion in his face.

He was like trying to think of something and he quickly stood up and said, I got to go to class and which often happens at the university when I say intense conversations like that. But I realized in that moment and it stuck in my mind that the world we live in today is so confused, so confused about who they are.

And we look at the news, I mean, you just wake up in the morning and look at the news, it's not hard to see that this same confusion is plaguing everything around us and not just our country and our

culture but the world.

And just like the church in Galatia and as Paul is talking to them, as we live in a confused world with these voices that are trying to tell us who we are, as the church, we must know who we are.

We must know who we are. And just like Paul, we must proclaim the gospel of Christ not only to ourselves every day but to our brothers and sisters in Christ at this church that we know around the world.

[15:40] We must proclaim the gospel just as Christ did and remind ourselves. We first must remind ourselves the same power that is enslaving, confusing, and distorting the truth and the hardened hearts of the people around us, that same power at one point enslaved us.

That we too were just like them, confused, lost, hardened, hated God, loved our sin, if we would have been there at that point when Jesus was going to the cross, we would have been right there with them chanting crucify him.

But, because of Christ and his great love with which he loved us, as he was hanging on the cross with millions of legions of angels at his hand to stop this from happening, if he wanted to stop, he stayed there so that we could be his.

And in his life and death and the resurrection, what he was doing, he was winning the right to look at you and me and say, you are mine and I'm yours.

To give us such a confidence to know how to answer that question. Just like the Galatian church that had the Judaizers and the Gentile culture coming around them with these voices, telling them, trying to tell them who they are.

[17:02] Every day when we wake up in this century, in this culture, the news and different media outlets are trying to tell us and proclaim who we are. They're trying to persuade us who we are.

Trying to tell you that you are your gender, you are your race, you are your ethnicity, you are your political affiliation, you are your nationality, you are your sexual freedom or your sexual identification, you are your cultural background and preferences.

You are the amount of money in your bank account or in your retirement savings. You are your family or your children's success or your success. You are who you will choose to be.

So on and on and on. The power of this world is seeking to bring us back into the darkness and to the confusion of who we are. And so we must proclaim the gospel to ourselves and to each other every day.

And second, we must do this because God has appointed his church to be the light of the world.

This body of people, God has appointed to be the light in the dark world.

[18:11] And as the world around us grows ever darkened by the confusion of who they are, the confidence that we have and who we are as Christ will be a beacon that shines so much brighter.

Just like in that example that I was giving. And one of the things, I've had the privilege of getting to see multiple people, many people, students, come to know the Lord.

and one of the common themes I've seen in the lives of these students who have been converted is that the thing that they were first intrigued by when they met someone that was a Christian is that they noticed that there was something different about them.

They noticed that they had a confidence or a joy that they had a happiness that they didn't understand. That they had a hope.

And by the work of the Spirit that continued to draw these students to themselves, to God's Word and who Christ is, their eyes were opened. But this is how we are a light in a dark world is when we know who we are, the world sees that.

[19:22] And they want to know why. They want to know what's different because they don't know who they are. And this is why we are a light is because we know who we are in a world and that doesn't know who they are.

And we must know also because the reality is your presence matters. If it's true that you know who you are as someone that's in Christ, your presence matters.

At the office, in your workplace, your presence matters. At your school, your presence matters. At home, around your neighbors, around your family, your sons, your daughters, your parents, aunts and uncles, your presence matters.

Because you have this confidence, the Spirit of God is in you among a world that doesn't have the Spirit of God. And as it grows increasingly confused, it's going to want to know why.

this is why being connected to a local church is so important.

[20 : 32] Being connected to a body of believers is we need each other. We need each other every day to remind us, like Paul is doing to this Galatian church, who we are and to remind us of the gospel, of who we were, what Christ has done, and now who we are.

And even the smallest act of service to a body of believers, that is investing and it matters because the body of Christ is pushing back this darkness in the world around us.

It's pushing back. And finally, to close up, we must live out the gospel in a way that reflects the love of Christ.

It's easy when we see the confusion and the growing darkness and the evil that is around us and in the world. It's easy to begin to separate ourselves and to disassociate and say, I will be over here, the world's over there, whatever happened to them, and I'm okay here.

And to disassociate ourselves. But what do we see in the last moments of Jesus' life? What we see as Jesus looks up out over this group of people, his friends that are betraying him, the Jews, his people that were yelling for him to be crucified, mocking him in this Gentile world that didn't care, didn't believe him.

[21 : 55] What did he say? He looked and he saw the confusion. He said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. He said, forgive them. They're confused. He had compassion.

He loved them and he stayed there and he died and he rose again for them. And so as us being the body of Christ, as us being the people that he is building as the church, we must have that same compassion.

When we see the lost people, the lost world around us, we have to love them. We have to intercede, pray for them, not disassociate ourselves. Jesus, when he was on his ministry, he looked out over the crowds and he had compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

They were confused. And at that point in his ministry, he was exhausted from all of his ministering but he said, no, I need to share the gospel with them. I'm going to share with them.

I'm going to go because they're like sheep without a shepherd. So this is our call and what a great love that is that Christ has had that we get to reflect to a growing, darkened world around us.

[23 : 00] So let us do likewise for the lost world that we see around us. Let's pray for them. Let's be the light to them and pray for opportunities to share and proclaim the gospel of hope to them.

So let me pray for us. God, we are so thankful for Jesus. Lord, that he came.

God endured the weight of our sin. God, that he hung on that cross and experienced your wrath on our behalf.

Lord, and he could have stopped. Lord, but he wanted, God, for us to be saved, to be co-heirs with him. God, to be Abraham's offspring with him.

God, and what a wonderful love that is. We thank you that you loved us so much that you would send him, God, to save us. So we ask as your church, Lord, that we would go out in the world that we would realize, God, the significance of our presence as your ambassadors, as people that, God, have the confidence of who we are in a world that doesn't, that we would look to be that light wherever we're going.

[24 : 17] As we go out to be the church, that you would use us. God, that you would push back the darkness through us, God, and that we would just fervently pray and have hearts of compassion for the lost world around us.

We, again, thank you for Jesus and that we can do this because of what he has done. We praise these things in your son's name. Amen.