

Sermon – June 19, 2022
“Children of God through Christ”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we join with Jesus on this mission field. Amen

Good morning! For those who might be wondering, at the conclusion of the Annual Conference when the appointments were fixed, I was re-appointed to the Northumberland Charge for another year. Annual Conference was again a very interesting event with wonderful worship, moments of intrigue, movements of Holy Spirit, tension, learning, blessings, and frustration. It was great to see old acquaintances and to catch up with them. It was a blessing to be with each other after two years of online meetings. And it is a blessing to be appointed to the Northumberland Charge to join with you for another year of ministry. Please keep all who are moving to new appointments in your prayers as they complete their packing, say goodbye, and head off to new homes, new places of ministry, and new calling. Give thanks to God for those whose time as a pastor has ended with retirement, and ask God to lead and guide us into effective ministry on this mission field in the coming year. Bob Pangle is our lay delegate to Annual Conference this year. Bob will make a fuller, more detailed report from Annual Conference at a later date. Thank you for your prayers as we met and traveled the roads to and from Hampton.

Paul is writing to the church in Galatia not to compliment them on how they are progressing in their faith, but to correct what they have been taught by new teachers who have come among them teaching another Gospel, or at least a version of the Gospel that stresses a continuation of the covenant given to Abraham as summarized in the Torah or Law. In this morning's reading, Paul is seeking to help the Galatians grow in their understanding of the significance of the faith in Christ and the gift of Holy Spirit in their lives. Paul is teaching them from a context of the Old Covenant and the Law. He is connecting the new teaching the Galatians have received from these false teachers, a teaching they may be moving towards, with the teaching he has given to them about life in Christ enabled by Holy Spirit.

For the Jews, the Torah was their guide. The Law defined them as a people. The Law's food restrictions separated them from other nations. The Law was an effective border around

them wherever they went. As they lived the Law, they were isolated from the Gentiles, even if they lived among Gentiles outside of Israel. Paul will be comparing the Law they are being encouraged to keep in full with freedom that comes with faith in Jesus.

When Paul refers to the Law, he notes that it imprisoned and guarded the Jewish people. It was also their disciplinarian. The Greek word that Paul uses here is pedagogue. It is not a word that we use frequently in our daily conversations, but was a well understood concept among the Greeks, especially among wealthier Greeks. We may be wondering if this is a word that a pastor should use in the pulpit on a Sunday morning. It is. Let me explain. Pedagogues were slaves who had charge of their master's youth from ages 2 – 17. The pedagogue was to teach them discipline and prepare them to enter the adult world as an adult. They were more than a teacher; they were in charge, kept order, disciplined, taught good manners, kept an unruly child in line, protected the child from dangers and bad influences, and prepared the child for life in the adult world. These slaves could and would use discipline to correct bad behavior and were sometimes seen as heavy handed in their role as the disciplinarian. We might be tempted to think there are some today who are living in Mom's basement playing video games all night who might benefit from a pedagogue.

Paul is comparing the Law given to Israel to this idea of a pedagogue. It was the Torah and Israel's adherence to its guidance for their lives that prepared Israel for the arrival of the Messiah. It was through the Law that some in Israel gained a greater view of what God was doing across time and sought to cooperate with God with open hearts to the arrival of God in the flesh, Jesus. As a pedagogue prepared a child to transition from being a child to an adult, the Law prepared Israel to move from being keepers of the Law to those with faith in Jesus. As young Greeks would enter into the world fully prepared by their experience with their pedagogue, the Law had prepared Israel for the arrival of Jesus and a new life in Christ.

Paul's point is that faith in Christ has freed them from the Law, and their baptism was the entry point into this new life, this new freedom from the Law. They no longer are subject to the Law as they now have put on Christ. They have left the time of life when they were trained by the Law and entered into a new life in Christ enabled by Holy Spirit.

Think of the imagery of baptism with the water clinging to and dripping off of a person after baptism. Baptism provides a visual image of being clothed in Christ. Something new has taken place, something that can be seen, experienced, and remembered. Paul's point is that faith

in Christ is not a movement into adulthood that followed the time with a demagogue, but a transformation into the fullness of life in Christ. A life in Christ removes old ideas of what separates us (male and female, slave and free, Jew and Greek) and replaces them with oneness in Christ. What remains is only oneness in Christ. All are new, transformed from the old self into the new self in Christ. Christ, and Christ alone, becomes the connection between believers. Those with this new self are also given the Spirit in baptism. Holy Spirit is the enabler allowing the faithful to live in Christ. The distant guarding Law, once written on stone, is now written on our hearts, bringing with it the desire to live as Christ lived and the power needed to be transformed and live this new life.

What is being argued by these new teachers Paul is writing about is that one needs to be a Jew, to fully keep the Law, in order to be in Christ and receive the promise given to Abraham. Paul turns their argument around, stating that it is through faith in Jesus that we become children of God who are heirs of Abraham. It is not by keeping the whole Law, but by faith in Christ that we are adopted into the family of God. We are adopted as children but are to grow into mature members of the household of God. Remember that maturity is noted by reproduction. As we become mature, we are able to reproduce. The mature grain that falls to the earth produces new life, new grain. The mature children of God are children growing more completely into the image of Christ. Maturity brings with it the sharing of one's faith so that others will also come to faith in Jesus, place their trust in Jesus, and become children of God who then grow into maturity and also reproduce. We should all be seeking to grow into maturity in Christ and reproduce by sharing the Good News that Jesus died for our sins and reconciles us to God. These Jewish Christian teachers are seeking to teach that it is by keeping the Law that we become heirs of Abraham. Paul teaches that oneness in Christ brings the promise of God given to Abraham, heirs according to the promise, members of the household of God.

The question for us today is not, "How much of the Law do we need to keep?" but, "How much of Jesus are we clothed with and how do we grow into Christ?" Our growth is guided by Holy Spirit. We also are those who have come to faith. We are children of God. We are to grow into the fullness of Christ, not by Law keeping, but through the outpouring of Holy Spirit into our lives. With Holy Spirit we are enabled for ministry. We are enabled to grow into Christ. Holiness is still defined by the Word of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is the beginning of putting on Jesus and becoming a child of God. Our focus becomes learning about

Jesus and seeking to join him in his mission to all people. Our growth in Christ comes as we understand what Jesus taught and what he did, and then to live into the grace Jesus gives. In this grace we learn to live in the fullness of a life in Christ, a life where we become mature in Christ and are seen as those who are reproducing, being used by Jesus in the power of Holy Spirit to help others put on Christ. Pray the simple prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come, and listen quietly for Holy Spirit's guidance for putting on Christ. Join in fellowship with other believers and seek to learn about Jesus. Open our hearts to the power from Holy Spirit to engage with those around us and share with them the Good News. Seek to be those who have put on Jesus Christ and love God and neighbor.

Pray with me: Jesus, come and clothe us that we may live as children of God and grow into the fullness of life in you. Jesus, send Holy Spirit to enable us that we may become mature in Christ and join you in your work to help others come to faith in you. Amen.

PRAYER TO HOLY SPIRIT
Saint Augustine (A.D. 354-430)

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.