

The Church in Galatia by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Litany based on Psalm 33

Leader: Let all the earth fear the Lord;

All: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

Leader: For He spoke, and it came to be;

All: he commanded, and it stood firm.

Leader: The counsel of the Lord stands forever,

All: the plans of His heart to all generations.

Leader: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,

All: the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Galatians 2:17-21 ¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Acts 17:22-32 ²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’”

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."

'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring.'
(Acts 17:28)

And our contribution to this life and movement, our being... is that of a sheep or a child, or even maybe just a lump of clay.

What is it that makes you who you are? Is it your work, your contribution to the world or your community?

Is it your family? The family name or maybe whose you are?

Is it your greatest achievement or award? Or perhaps you define yourself by your lowest moment. A disappointment you can't quite shake. (I think we all do this from time to time.)

These things may not make us who we are, but we allow these things to define us, name us, drive us...

Jesus Christ is here to make one thing clear. You define yourself the wrong way. We all do this. You are not the sum of your accomplishments nor your mistakes. You are not even defined by your everyday actions or decisions. Whatever integrity or self-discipline you have... your righteousness: that did not come from you. You did not produce it. It is not who you are.

There is only one thing that defines us in this life. And we have very little control over this thing that defines us. You are the sum of what you put your faith in.

Identity. Your identity comes from what you believe about yourself and God. You are the product not of your free will, your choices, or actions. You are the product of your faith.

And thanks be to God; you have a living God that gives you something to believe in – His presence!

‘In him we live and move and have our being’... (Acts 17:28)
Or as Paul says in the letter to the Church in Galatia:

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.
(Galatians 2:20-21)

This was the first Letter that Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia (Modern day Turkey). When Paul wrote this letter it was delivered to a church by messenger. Some one would stand up before the gathered people and read it. Then the messenger would take it to the next church and so on.

The same was true of Thessalonica for that matter. That city may have been the primary audience, but it would have made its way, being read out loud, to each of the churches listed in Acts 17. Thessalonica, then Beroe’a and then Athens... and on to countless others.

And we know that within a generation or so each of the churches got copies of each other's letters. The beginning of what we now know as the Bible.

In Acts 17 we see this same argument first given in Galatians from Paul when he is in Athens. The closest city would have been Thessalonica. The letter to the Thessalonians.

This was a significant event. The Greek Philosophers, Epicurean and Stoic, who had not little debate among themselves, gave Paul the microphone within the city square... they asked him to speak on Capital Hill.

And Paul goes for the jugular. The heart of the issue. God does not live in Shrines, nor can you serve him... or give anything to him that he might need. It is the other way around. It is God who created all things and in whom we have *We have life and move and have our being'*

If God were to remove his presence, we would be a lump of muscle and bone lying on the floor. Even if he took away just his guidance we would return to our animal instinct and devour each other.

God doesn't need, nor does he expect anything from us. God knows, as we should, that he is the one pulling the strings. He is well aware of how dependent we are on him, because he is right now making this moment happen.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. ... for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (Galatians 2:20-21)

This is a subtle argument, but on it lies all the chips. If you can shape your own destiny and identity by following a set of rules, then Christ had no reason to die. But the reality is you must be set free from this idea that you are your own. God is so active and present in your everyday you have very little room to claim any credit of your own.

But we like the rules, any set of rules. The ones we make up for ourselves, our own values and goals. We especially like that type of law no matter how lousy or selfish the philosophy behind it. And we have been told our whole life that we not only get to make up our own rules, but that they might save us. If we can all just agree on one way of living life we can all finally be at peace.

Or maybe we are mature enough to realize there is only one good set of rules, and we don't get to make up the rules. They were given to us by the maker of the game. But even these rules, for living life right in God's sight, do not give us life. You will not some day be complete when you can do what God expects of you.

You are already complete, you already have the life God intended. Because it is in God that *we live and move and have our being*.

This is not a someday reality, this is your reality. This is your identity. What makes you who you are is this unknowable, uncontrollable influence tugging on your heart and the back of your mind. The countless influences all around you that drive each action and word you speak. You are not in control of your own life, nor did God ever intend for you to be... or desire for you to think you are.

And yet that is our predicament. We have been told our whole lives otherwise and we actually do think and act as if who we are is up to us.

You are a product of your faith. The trouble is we don't like that. We have no control over that. If this is true, we cannot shape our own destiny nor control our future. ... This is a scary reality... yet it also is a freeing reality!

You are sheep ... with a shepherd. You are a child ... in the Father's hands. You are clay in the master potter's hands.

You have been crucified with Christ. Even now as you hear these words your independence from God is being crucified with Christ! So that you can once again be a product of your faith in God.

When Eli was 3-4 years old, we were reading a book before nap time. We ended up wrestling and at some point, he was laying on my chest. I asked him if – ‘Are you, my turtle?’ It was in the book we had just read. ‘Who is my Turtle? ... I am. Who is my Turtle? ... I am. Who is my Turtle? ... I am.’ ‘Yes you are mine.’

Every word spoken into your life from the very beginning. Every, ‘I love you, I am there for you, you are mine!’ that has instilled in you a concept of self-worth. Yes, those words came from parents and friends, but they were also from God. That is who you are. And no amount of self-searching or attempts to prove yourself can change that reality.

You are and always have been the sum of words spoken to you that you have trusted in and believed. You are the product of your faith!

...the life [you]now live in the flesh [you] live by faith in the Son of God. (Galatians 2:20)

