

Haute Couture

June 20, 2010

Ross Erb

Last week, Pastor Phil gave insight into the story behind Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. He talked about the fight that Paul was having with Peter; a struggle about how to put into practice the decision made at the Jerusalem conference and recounted in Acts 15. At question was just how closely, if at all, Gentile believers need to follow the Jewish religious laws. Phil pointed out that theory said they did not need to, while practice was a bit more complicated than that.

The passage we heard read today, from the third chapter of Galatians, continues Paul's treatise on being justified by faith. Verses 23 – 25 set out how, prior to Jesus, it was the law that governed God's chosen. As important as the law was to the Jews, and to Paul with his Jewish training, Paul says in verse 21 that the law cannot give life. In fact, we have been locked up under the law, in a sort of holding pattern until the coming of Jesus and the faith we could receive through trust in Christ. In essence, the law became a kind of disciplinarian or guard to keep God's children until the advent of faith in Christ.

It is through belief in Jesus that we become drawn in as children of God. I'd like to take just a moment to say that this was not a new plan that God cooked up because the whole law thing wasn't working so well. From the beginning, God's intent was that through Israel all the nations of the world would be drawn to worship God. Listen to Genesis 12: 1-3. The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

God gives Abram three blessings. God promises to make of Abram a great nation, to bless him, and to make Abram's name great. Immediately following these three promises, God says that this is happening so that Abram will be a blessing to others. Verse three ends with the phrase, "...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." If you read the story of Abraham carefully, you will read how the glory of God was made apparent to many of the nations with whom Abraham had contact.

Jump ahead to the establishment of the temple in Jerusalem. Hear Isaiah 56: 6-7.

And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD
to minister to him,
to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it
and who hold fast to my covenant—

these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for all nations."

Foreigners will be accepted as they follow the Mosaic laws,

and the temple will be known as a house of prayer for all peoples.
Worship of God was not just for Israel,
but for all who would come to know God.

In light of this, Galatians 3:26 is not news.
All along, God has had a place for all,
Jew AND Gentile, in God's family.
Paul is saying that faith in Jesus brings anyone fully into that family.
We become known as children of God
because when we were baptized into Christ
we have clothed ourselves with Christ.
This is the piece that I'd like us to consider closely today.
What does it mean to be clothed with Christ?

If you have any awareness of events in the world this past week,
you know that the World Cup of soccer is occurring in South Africa.
This is the most closely followed sporting event in the world.
For those who are there, or those watching the games on TV,
the teams are known by their jerseys.
When I hold up this jersey,
my guess is that some of you know immediately
which country's players wear this.
What team is it? Argentina.
If I had other jerseys available,
I could have held them up
and likely someone would have been able to identify the team.
Anyone wearing this jersey during the World Cup
would be identified as a supporter of Argentina.
On the soccer pitch, you know that the person wearing this jersey
is playing to represent Argentina.

Clothing can identify who we are,
where we are from,
or who or what we support.
Let me give another example.
Are you familiar with the term "haute couture"?
It's a French phrase meaning "high sewing", or "high dressmaking".
I found out that it is actually a controlled term

and that not just any clothier can use it.
Haute couture is made to order for a specific customer,
and it is usually made from high-quality, expensive fabric
and sewn with extreme attention to detail and finish
by the most experienced and capable seamstresses,
often using time-consuming, hand-executed techniques.
I have to say that the definition I just gave is thanks to Wikipedia.

I suppose that I don't know what haute couture really looks like.
To be honest, and this should be no surprise to anyone,
I'm not one to pay much attention at all to fashion or clothes.
But someone who wears haute couture is making a statement.
That statement might be that they are wealthy.
It might be that they care about appearance.
And we might make assumptions about a person
based on what they wear.
They are elegant, refined, snobbish, aristocratic, powerful, important.
If the person tends more toward Thrift Shop Chic,
we may think that they are working class, middle class, poor,
common, salt of the earth, slovenly, lazy, unimportant.
All kinds of information can be inferred based on how a person dresses.

To clothe oneself with Christ must surely be the ultimate in haute
couture! Can you imagine any garment that could be of higher quality
than Christ?
Or created with more love and attention to detail
by a more skilled seamstress than God?
And surely we would say that it is a garment
that was designed specifically for the individual wearer!
Spiritually speaking, I am dressed in haute couture!
All of a sudden I'm feeling pretty special, and so should you!

The challenge, of course,
is to figure out what in the world it means to be clothed with Christ.
What does that look like?
There are a number of possibilities.
It might mean that we wear a cross on a chain around our neck,
or a t-shirt that has a Bible verse on it

or some phrase that proclaims a message about God.
I'm almost certain that is NOT what it means to be clothed with Christ.
In fact, I'm almost certain that it has nothing to do with what we wear,
and everything to do with our attitudes and how we behave.

If we are clothed with Christ,
I have to assume that just like with other clothing,
people can see us and make judgments about us based on that clothing.
So our attitudes, which cannot help but be manifested in our behaviors,
are our Christ-clothes.

Perhaps this is why Paul goes on to say in Galatians 3:28
"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free,
neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
These other differences fade away when we are clothed with Christ.
People will not see those differences
because they will first see Christ.
I believe that is what Paul was saying to the church in Galatia,
and that is what this letter is saying to us today.
The more fully dressed in Christ we can be,
the less our individual differences will matter.

I want to end by reading a short journal entry.
This was written by Everett Brubaker,
who just graduated from EMHS
and is in Eastern Europe with the schools Touring Choir.

June 13
The day began in our small hotel in Wroclaw. We packed up our things, had breakfast at the hotel and departed for Katowice. It was a 3-4 hour bus ride and we arrived ready to sing for a Baptist congregation. We sang 6 songs total throughout the service. We were there on a day when several members were getting baptized. It was fun singing for an energetic congregation and listening to a service that was entirely in Polish. After the service we drove to Polwice. We spent the afternoon relaxing, playing cards, playing soccer, and just enjoying each others company. It was a gorgeous day and the host church also prepared a wonderful meal for us. We sang our evening concert to a full house. After the concert, the congregation and the choir fellowshiped outside. There was barbeque, games of soccer and volleyball (Poland vs USA).

There were little children running around. I met this little 5 or 6-year-old kid who I later found out was named Naton. He was kicking a ball around so I hopped in and kicked a soccer ball with him. He was having a great time but after a half hour or so he scurried off to the playground. I went and sat in a chair to watch a volleyball game which seemed to be getting quite heated. After some time Naton came and stood next to me. He was holding a paper plate full of salad and seemed to be having some trouble holding the plate while maneuvering a fork so I put out my hands and he set his plate on them and continued to eat the salad. Upon finishing his first salad, he proceeded to go back for seconds and thirds, each time returning and using my hands for a table. He talked to me while he ate, all in Polish. I smiled and nodded and laughed when he was and looked concerned when he did. Naton eventually headed out to leave with his dad and while scampering away, turned back and yelled something in Polish. He dad turned back and yelled, "Tomorrow?" I smiled and gave him a thumbs up. Later that evening our choir was assigned to hosts. John and I are currently with a host family who speaks virtually no English. It is proving to be quite an adventure but one John and I are excited to take head on.

-Everett Brubaker

Now, you might wonder about my choice of this entry,
but to me, Everett was fully clothed in Christ on June 13.
He was showing love to Naton,
and differences of language and culture disappeared.
There was neither American nor Pole, teen nor youth, East nor West.
There was just two of God's children,
one of whom, Everett,
was bringing glory to God through simple acts of friendship and service.
It is my prayer that we all have stories like that.
We might be like Everett,
showing God to others,
or we may be like Natan,
seeing God through the Christ-clothes that others are wearing.

The song we are going to sing, #373 in our hymnal,
uses a slightly different metaphor, that of a vine and branches,
but the words speak to this idea of being immersed in Christ.

*“May we, loving one another, radiant in thy light abide; so through us,
made fruitful by thee, shall our God be glorified.”*

May we, who have been baptized into Christ,
clothe ourselves in Christ, to the glory of God.