

Our Identity in Christ
 Galatians 3:23-29
 Tampa Covenant Church
 04 October 2026

Proposition: In Christ we are sons of God through faith; therefore, we find our identity in Christ alone.

FCF: Finding our identity in human distinctions more than our shared identity in Christ.

RHF: Through his person and work, Christ has freed us from the guardianship of the law and made us sons of God, united to one another in him as heirs according to God's promise.

(#1) Introduction:

As you can see the title of this sermon is *"Our identity in Christ."* And it's not so much about how our identity is shaped by the various hats we wear or roles we play. But more so, who we are *"in Christ"* and how we live it out in this community and before a watching world. Because it's true we can affirm, *"Yes, my identity is in Christ,"* yet live in a manner that actually undermines or even subverts the very identity we claim. And in our text this morning, Paul will show us what it means to be *"in Christ"* as we do life together as *"heirs according to promise."* So, let's pray that the Holy Spirit will press the truth of the gospel (#2) into our hearts as we give our attention to God's word.

Life Under the Law: vv.23-25

Recall last week, Paul asks two questions concerning the law: 1) Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions. Meaning, it was added to show sin as a conscious violation against God's commands. And it remained in play until the offspring should come to whom the promise was made. Next, he asked, *"Is the law contrary to the promise?"* Certainly not, because if the law could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But it can't so the law is not contrary to the promise. Rather the law serves the promise as *Scripture (law) imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ would be given to those who believe (Gal 3:22).*

In today's text, Paul is continuing that thought as he unpacks what life was like (#3) under the law. He writes, *"Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed."* What does Paul mean by, *"Before faith came"*? He doesn't mean faith was never present in the Old Covenant community because when we go back to Gen 15, we see that Abraham certainly had faith. He believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. So, the faith Paul that Paul has in view, he's already mentioned in v.22. It's faith in Jesus Christ; a distinctively Christ-centered faith.¹ So, from the time the Mosaic law was put in place, Paul is saying, those under the law were held captive and imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. (#4) And he concludes in v.24, *"So then the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."*

The word Paul (#5) uses here for *guardian*² reflected a common practice in the Roman world, where a household slave exercised responsibility over a particular child. He would accompany the child to school; ensured assignments were finished on time. And guardianship included discipline as warranted. Now, this wasn't necessarily a negative thing. The guardian had an important role. As a constant presence in

the child's life, his primary duty was to keep them in line; *"You need to be here and not there; you need to do this and not that."* We know how that feels right; it's exhausting.

(#6 Blank) I remember when our oldest daughter Chelsea was born and I changed her diaper for the first time in the hospital. My mother-in-law; who's since gone to be with the Lord, was right there looking over my shoulder. And no sooner had I touched my daughter's diaper, I heard, *"No, Marco! No mi vida; ese no se hace."* *"No, Marco!"* It was nerve-racking but she wasn't doing anything wrong. I was a brand-new father and needed all the help I could get. Again, we all know what it's like operating under the watchful eye of someone spring loaded to issue a correction. And that gives us a sense of the kind of guardianship Paul has in view. It was burdensome, demanding and didn't relent but it served a legitimate purpose. And most notably, it wasn't a permanent arrangement.

(#7) Because Paul says in v.25, *"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."* It's not that the guardian failed, rather it ended with the coming of Christ. Just as a child who's matured into adulthood no longer needs a guardian, those who belong to Christ are no longer under the law as their guardian; we've been justified by faith. Church, this is good news because the pressure to perform good works in order to achieve or maintain right standing before God has been shattered by the grace of God. Now, this grace doesn't free us to do whatever we want in the Christian life. It frees us from the burden of trying to earn what God has already given us in Christ. That's good news: in Christ, our relationship to God has changed. We're no longer under the law because (#8) we've been united to Christ.

Life In Christ: (vv.26-29)

(#9) Paul says in v.26, *"in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith."* The NT doesn't give us a clean definition of what *"In Christ"*³ means. But that prepositional phrase carries a lot of weight in Paul's writings. And when he uses it, he isn't simply saying that Christ has done something for us. He's saying that through faith we now exist in union with him. We're really joined to him; he is in us and we are in (#10) him. Recall Gal. 2:20, when Paul said, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is I who no longer live but Christ lives in me and the life I live now in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me."* (#11) Sinclair Ferguson said, *"The faith that unites us to Christ also sucks in every spiritual blessing in him. Blessings of peace with God, hope in suffering, the presence of God, and freedom from condemnation."*⁴

(#12) And Paul identifies sonship as one of these great blessings, which speaks to our new identity as sons of God through faith. Paul's choice of the word "sons" matters because in Scripture sonship carried with it the idea of status, privilege and the blessing of an inheritance. His usage of the word may come off as if he's speaking just to men but women are also included. (#13 Blank) And this declaration served as pushback against those who insisted that faith in Christ had to be supplemented by works of the law in securing right standing before God. But Paul completely levels the playing field by saying, you are all children of God through faith alone in Christ alone. Church, this is real and it's forever. But there are also real times in our lives when we don't feel like sons and daughters of God. After service is over, we'll return to everyday life. And we will experience and contend with various consequences marked by the fall: relationship strains and bouts with anxiety, loneliness, disappointment and frustration. And sometimes those things can become so overwhelming, it's hard to see past them. But none of those difficulties

changes who we are in Christ; you're still a son and you're still a daughter. Because our status as God's children doesn't depend on how we feel on a given day or even what we're going through; it rests on Christ and our union with him.

(#14) Paul helps us to see this in v.27, *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* Paul isn't saying our union with Christ stems from our baptism; rather he's reflecting on how baptism points to the inward reality of our spiritual cleansing by faith. It signifies that we've been washed and cleansed from sin.⁵ And it's a seal that visibly marks us as Christ's own forever. And Paul says our baptism reveals that we've *"put on Christ."* The NLT adds that it's, *"like putting on new clothes."* Which **(#15 Blank) certainly sheds** light on how we describe this alien righteousness that's ours in Christ. Meaning, when God looks at us, he sees the righteousness of his Son because we've been clothed in Christ's righteousness. And so, if our baptism testifies to the fact that we've put on Christ; then we're publicly declaring that we do not belong to ourselves; we belong to Christ. Our identity has changed.

Malcolm Gladwell said in one of his books that much of what we call our identity is assembled from the world around us; from our ethnicity, religion, the music we listen to, the clothes we wear, and even the products we buy.⁶ In other words, we're constantly putting on little insignias and identifying with cultural artifacts in helping us describe who we are and what we're like; that's fine. But if we take Paul's words seriously, we have to conclude that none of those things ultimately define us. Rather our truest identity rests in the fact that we've put on Christ and have been robed in his perfect righteousness. This is indeed who we are. And the sovereign Lord of the universe calls us son, and he calls us daughter. And while there are all kinds of things out there that may describe who we are, none of them describe whose we are.

(#16) And Paul makes this clear for us in v.28, *"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."* Paul gives three pairs of distinctions that the Galatian believers would've quickly recognized: Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female. Which really boil down to race, class and sex.⁷ That first distinction between Jew/Greek was vital to Paul's argument in this letter. It challenged the Judaizers' assertion that Gentiles needed to take on Jewish identity markers in order to be fully accepted in the covenant community.⁸ These distinctions were prevalent in Paul's day and they're alive and well in our day too.

(#17 Blank) Paul has set the table nicely in arriving at this conclusion. If everyone in these Galatian churches, regardless of race, class or sex, are no longer under a guardian and have become a child of God through faith, and if everyone has been baptized into Christ and put on Christ, then Paul is saying they're all one in Christ. And the same is true of us right here, right now: we are all one in Christ! Now Paul isn't saying that these distinctions no longer exist. No! Just look around the sanctuary. We come from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds and the community is made up of both male and female.⁹ These distinctions absolutely exist but Paul's point is clear, none of them serve as the basis for determining our standing before God nor our belonging in the covenant community. Because the unity and equality among God's people isn't some optional scriptural application we take or leave; it flows directly out of the gospel itself.¹⁰

What does that look like at Tampa Covenant Church? I think we can all (#18) start by asking ourselves; *“what distinction or distinctions am I holding on to that may be serving as a barrier to fellowship in the body of Christ?”* And something tells me; that if we ask the Holy Spirit to reveal those distinctions we’re prone to make; we’ll begin to see where we’re finding our identity. (#19 Blank) Don’t get me wrong, we all naturally gravitate toward what’s familiar and comfortable. People who look like us, talk like us and have similar backgrounds and cultural habits. And none of that is inherently sinful. But underneath it all; if our hearts are inclined to see race, class, sex, our politics, age and ability as determining factors of who we fellowship or don’t fellowship with then by our actions we’re saying, *“I don’t mind if these distinctions fracture what Christ died to unify.”* To give in to these practices is to allow human distinctions to define us over more than our shared identity in Christ. Tampa Covenant Church, this can’t be our witness to a watching world.

We are one in Christ now, and there’s coming a day when we will enjoy perfect fellowship in the presence of our Savior in the new heavens and new earth. But we don’t have to wait until that day. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we start now. And where our attitudes and actions have run contrary to the oneness that God has given to us in Christ, we repent to God and to one another. And only by his grace, we habitually endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And we treat one another equally as brothers and sisters in Christ. And in so doing, we provide this watching world with a glimpse of a community Christ has made new and is (#20) making new. John Stott said, *“before Christ, we were all equal in our need of salvation, equal in our inability to earn or deserve it; and equal in the fact that God has granted it to us freely in Christ.”*¹¹ And if that’s true, let us resist and flee from any and all temptations to despise or patronize one another on the basis of any distinction or seeming inequality. Because our standing before God and fellowship with each other isn’t determined by those things. Rather it’s been firmly established in our shared union with Christ.

Conclusion:

(#21) Here in v.29 Paul brings the argument full circle for the Galatian churches and also for us, *“And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”* (#22) Paul returns to the premise he established in v.7, *“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”* This is who we are. We’re no longer under a guardian because in Christ we’re sons and daughters of God through faith. (#23 Blank) This is the gospel; the gospel of grace that gives us a new identity, a new hope and unites us all in Christ. And so let us live as heirs according to the promise of God both inside and outside of this covenant community, so that others may see Christ in us, the hope of glory, now and forevermore. Amen.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 241–242.

² παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*), guardian, custodian, supervisor (1Co 4:15; Gal 3:24, 25+)

³ Paul uses the phrase “In Christ” or variation thereof over 80x in his letters and 8x in the letter to the Galatian Churches.

⁴ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 108.

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 145–46.

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures*, unabridged audiobook, narrated by Malcolm Gladwell (New York: Hachette Audio, 2009), 3:09:00.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 100–101.

⁸ Moo, 253–254.

⁹ Stott, 100–101.

¹⁰ G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Ga 3:28–29.

¹¹ Stott, 100.