

## Jesus is My OS

Last week, we spent some time investigating the context in which the Letter to the Galatians was written, aided and abetted by Paul's rather strident defense of his own authority and by his account of his throwdown with Peter over that apostle's sudden reluctance to share table fellowship with Gentile converts to the Way of Jesus. Today, we come to a far more positive section of the letter in Paul's statement of the point he is actually trying to make. You might call our reading for this morning Paul's thesis statement for the Epistle to the Galatians or, if you are into classical Greek literary theory, you might call it the proposition of Galatians, as does Richard Longenecker, Professor of New Testament at the University of Toronto and author of the volume on Galatians in the excellent Word Biblical Commentary, to whom I am greatly indebted in my study of this letter. This *propositio* of Paul's is an exceptionally interesting passage with which to grapple: it is central not only to this letter but to the whole of Paul's writings and perhaps to the New Testament itself, especially if we take seriously the contention of some scholars that Galatians, being the earliest of Paul's extant letters, is therefore the oldest writing of any kind on Jesus and the Way which he taught. Additionally, although this passage contains one of the most quoted lines from Paul ("I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me"), it is, as Longenecker writes, "notoriously difficult to trace out its line of thought."

This morning, with the assistance of several commentators, prayer and, I hope, the Holy Spirit, I will attempt to do just that – moving through the tightly packed prose of St. Paul with the aim of bringing some clarity and a bit of post-modern resonance to this critical passage. Along the way, I'll pay special attention to what I understand Paul to be talking about when he writes of "faith in Jesus Christ," the danger of legalism and how the computers that sit in the homes of nearly every one of us can help us understand the well-known gem in this passage.

Paul does a lovely bit of transitional writing as he begins this thesis statement of his letter. Moving from his recollection of his argument with Peter, he sets up his argument with the Judaizers, those Jewish Christians who are now telling his friends in Galatia that they must fully convert to Judaism if they are to be "real" Christians. "We ourselves," he writes, referring to himself and Peter, "are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners..." "Are these new teachers making you "Gentile sinners" feel like second-class citizens while exalting themselves as true Jews?" he seems to be asking. "OK, fine, listen to what two good Jewish boys like Simon and Saul figured out – living by the Law can't get you right with God. Only Jesus can do that."

To jump ahead slightly to verse 17, Paul continues his argument with the Judaizers. "But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?" This is one of those verses that needs a bit of unpacking. The contention of the Judaizers against Peter and Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians working with the Gentiles of Galatia, remember, was that they shouldn't be eating with the Gentiles, whose dietary habits might be ritually unclean for observant Jews, Christian or otherwise. Paul no doubt remembers that this was also an accusation that men of his former party, the Pharisees, had made against Jesus, that he ate with "sinful men." If he or Peter or Barnabas are guilty of being sinners because they ignore food rituals for the sake of fellowship, then so was Jesus. He knows, of course, that not even the Judaizers or Jerusalem Party, as they were sometime known, will allow Jesus to be branded a sinner. They are followers of Jesus, after all, even if they are in disagreement with Paul. "Is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!"

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Instead, Paul says, he could rightly be called a transgressor if he returns to the things he laid aside in order to become a faithful follower of Jesus. It had been the zealotry of Saul (as he was then known) for the Law of Moses that had caused him to become the most ardent persecutor of the followers of Jesus. When Jesus was revealed to him as the Son of God, Paul was forced to reevaluate the primacy of the Law in his life. Clearly the Law had to come second to Jesus, so if Jesus taught or lived the message that loving fellowship with all people was more important than strict observance of the Law, then that was how it must be. For Paul, enforcing the Law on men and women not born to it would have been a betrayal of the one who had rescued him from the path of death. He has “died to the law” so that he can “live to God” on the path of Jesus.

It is worth repeating that while we do not face a temptation or a challenge to return to a strict interpretation of Torah in order to fully practice our faith that any brand of legalism, any practice or philosophy that comes between us and following Jesus, is an affront to the freedom of love that Jesus died to bring us. We are freed by the Crucified One to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength without fearing the judgment. We are freed by the Risen Christ to love our sisters and brothers as we love ourselves and as Christ loved us, ready to even die for them, not judging them by categories we create. If we use the Law, any law, to divide ourselves from others rather than as a tool to help us understand how best to live in Beloved Community, then we are as guilty as Paul said he would be for building up again the Law he had torn down as an obstacle in his path to Christ. When any living faith becomes reduced to mere adherence to a set of rules, it is legalism and carries the taint of death rather than the spirit of life. Just as there was a legalism that corrupted the original, hopeful message of the Pharisees and a legalism that crept into the church in Jerusalem, there has been a legalism in every Christian church, denomination and sect. There is a legalism of the left as well as of the right and we must be careful not to fall into either trap.

Important as it is to understand what Paul is preaching against in this passage, it is far more important to understand what he is advocating. “A person is justified not by the works of the law,” he writes, “but through faith in Jesus Christ.” A number of the commentators I’ve read think that we can understand better what that means by being a little more careful with our translation of Paul’s Greek. While his phrase *πιστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* may indeed be rendered “faith in Jesus Christ,” it might more rightly be translated here, “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.” There is good corroborating evidence in other passages from Paul as to this translation. We are justified, or made right in God’s eyes, by the faithful acts of Jesus as he steadfastly did the will of the Father. It is another reminder from Paul that it is by the freely given gift of God in Christ that we are able to stand in God’s presence as those who are without sin. We did nothing to earn this status and indeed we cannot do anything to earn this status – no one will be justified by the works of the law.

The death of Jesus, his full faithfulness to the will of God in giving himself for even those who scorned him, makes us free but we can only be truly free when we realize that we are free. That is why Paul writes, “we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of Christ.” I hope it goes without saying but for Paul, remember, belief in Christ was not simply a sort of intellectual assent to the rightness of his teachings. The proposition of

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Galatians is not about a propositional belief in Christ. It is about a lived belief in Christ. It is about discipleship, following in the way of Jesus, a discipleship that means, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” This is what Paul means when he writes, “I have been crucified with Christ.” To follow Jesus rightly, we must allow everything in us that is self-centered to die; indeed, we must put it to death, so that we may become Christ-centered. If we are living a Christ-centered life, then truly we do not live but Christ lives in us.

Here’s another, rather more fanciful and post-modern way to understand this concept. How many of you have ever had a serious virus on your computer? When you get a really bad virus, it completely takes over your operating system, preventing you from doing the simplest tasks, erasing all your files and so on. Your hard disk, the center of your computer, has become corrupt. Now, let’s think of ourselves as that computer. We have been made by God to enjoy God’s company, to tend God’s world, to live in fellowship with our neighbors, sort of a big, connected server farm. But along comes a virus. Let’s call it Excessive Pride or Selfishness or, in Biblical terminology, Sin. Maybe we got it from input we got from others – somebody slipped us a bad floppy disc or we visited an infected website. With the advent of Wi-Fi, maybe we just got it from the air around us, which seems particularly apt if you remember that Paul himself wrote to the Ephesians that temptations come from “the power of the air” and that the early Christian theologian Athanasius wrote that it was when Jesus was lifted into the air on the cross that he confronted and defeated all the demonic powers. But I digress...

So now we have this virus, Sin, and it’s corrupting our hard disc and rewriting our code, changing our very operating system into one that, rather than enjoying God’s company is afraid of God, rather than tending God’s creation is abusing it, rather than living in peace and harmony with our neighbors, quarrels and hates and perpetuates the virus. If you had a virus like that on your computer, what would you do? You might try using an anti-virus program but there’s not one that’s effective on all viruses. You might junk your computer but that’s an extreme and expensive solution. Or you might strip it down and rebuild it with a new operating system. That’s what Paul says he did with his life. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” Paul wiped out his old operating system, the Law, and allowed God to install ChristJesusOS. As I mentioned last week, Paul still had his faults. He confesses plainly in Romans that he is still prone to sin. He still got viruses, in other words. But when he allowed the anti-virus software built into ChristJesusOS to work... OK, I’m being a little silly but you get the point, I hope. Whether we think of it as having Jesus as our OS or, in hardware terms, like having Jesus Inside rather than Intel Inside, to believe in Christ means letting Jesus take over our lives and the way we live them, being true disciples in dying to ourselves and living as much as we possibly can in the way Jesus would have us live. God becomes our vision, heart of our own heart. The great Jehovah becomes our guide to all matters of life, great or small. In good old Baptist terms, we let Jesus come into our heart.

Paul concludes, “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. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.” It is his restatement of his core idea; that only God’s freely given grace and the love that Christ Jesus bore for all Creation have any power to reboot humanity, to give us the second and third and fourth chances we need, as many as we need, to

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learn to live in the kind of love for God and for others that were the intention of God for Creation all along. Christ did not die for nothing – he died for me and for you and for you and for you; for all humankind and for all Creation. We need not follow the Law, perform a thousand little rituals, obey hundreds of specific rules to earn his sacrifice. It was freely given. All we must do is let him love us and let him through us love the world.

And so may the grace of God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit attend us all, from this day and for ever more. Amen.