

What Am I Clinging To?

Galatians 3:1-12

Sermon

Hobart, August 12th, 2011

Devonport, August 25th, 2011

Launceston, August 26th, 2011

Scripture Readings:

Galatians 3:1-14

³ Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. ² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? ⁴ Have you experienced* so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

⁵ I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

⁶ In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith."^{*} ⁷ The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you."⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

¹⁰ But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law."¹¹ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."¹² This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life."

¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."¹⁴ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.¹

* Or *Have you suffered.*

* Gen 15:6.

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ga 3:1-14). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. THE STORY OF ISRAEL IS AN AMAZING ONE

A. HOW GOD TOOK THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

1. and rescued them from slavery and genocide in Egypt
2. Totally without strength or hope
3. And brought them into the Promised Land

B. BUT IT IS ALSO A TRAGIC STORY

1. How they doubted the God who loved them, and did everything to rescue, care for and bless them, in spite of their attitudes and actions
2. How they continued to distrust and sought to fix things their way
3. And how they eventually ended up in captivity and exile
4. So it is a lesson of warning as well

C. BUT IT IS ABOVE ALL A STORY AND LESSON OF GRACE & HOPE

1. As after a time in captivity God again rescued them, and brought a remnant back to their land so that the Messiah could be born their among them, as one of them, and rescue not only them, but all mankind, once, finally and completely
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S.P.S:

A. SADLY MANY OF THE JEWS BELIEVED THAT THE SOLUTION TO THEIR PAST PROBLEMS WAS TO KEEP THE LAW MORE PRECISELY

1. This attitude even invaded the early church
 - a) So that Gentile members, as well as Jewish, were being told be some that they had to be circumcised and keep days and other laws in order to be truly the people of God
2. They saw their identity, their security and their future as being based on special knowledge and actions
 - a) On who they were, what they knew, how and where they worshipped, and other strict religious observances
 - (1) **They also looked to the land they lived in, their identity as descendants of Abraham, and the presence of the Temple**

B. STEPHEN DIED AS A RESULT OF TELLING THEM THEY HAD STUBBORNLY TRUSTED IN THE WRONG THINGS

1. While they claimed to be followers of Moses, they were like their predecessors who rebelled against God and Moses and built an idol in the wilderness
 - a) They put their trust in the man-made temple, rather than Jesus Christ, who was God with us, the true presence of God through whom we meet and worship God
 - b) The God who is not constricted to any particular place, but is to be worshipped everywhere
 - c) The God who we are to worship all the time, not just on one particular day

C. TODAY

1. We are going to talk about the importance of putting our hopes, our trust completely in Jesus

- a) And be careful not to let our human nature get us doubting that he is enough, and starting to trust and cling to other ideas, practices or beliefs or material things, instead, or as some kind of supplement as if our lives need something else

D. PRAYER

BODY:

A. HUMAN NATURE IS A DEVIANT THING

1. Our natural hearts and minds can delude, and mislead us if we aren't letting God's Spirit enlighten us
2. We can feel absolutely sure we have things right, and that we are trusting in the right things, that we have the right beliefs, and are doing what is necessary to be good and solid Christians

B. PAUL WARNED THE GALATIANS

Galatians 3:1-12

3 Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. ² Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. ³ How foolish can you be? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort? ⁴ Have you experienced* so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

C. IN VERSE 1, PAUL IS SAYING HE IS ASTOUNDED

1. How could they, after seeing so clearly who Jesus was, all that he did at the cross for them, as one of them on their behalf,

* Or *Have you suffered.*

- a) Giving his all, his life and death to bring them God's salvation once and for all, totally and completely
 - b) It all being done by him, none of it depending on us
2. How could they so foolishly then believe that it wasn't enough, and that they had to supplement Christ's saving work with keeping the law
- a) Paul is saying, that it is so shocking, foolish and unbelievable that they have had this change of mind that it must be an evil spell or something that has bewitched their thinking

⁵ I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

3. The evidence that God is with them, that they are functioning as his saved people, the new Israel is there
- a) They have the fruits, they have the Holy Spirit guiding and empowering them
 - b) This is because they have heard and believed and trusted in the message about Jesus Christ
- (1) Not because they kept particular religious rules**

⁶ In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." ⁷ The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

D. THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM IS WHAT COUNTS. THE COVENANT BASED ON FAITH IN GOD.

- 1. Faith in the promise of God, that was unconditional, and for all people and all time
- 2. The Old Covenant and its laws were temporary as Paul made clear in Galatians

⁸ What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to

* Gen 15:6.

Abraham long ago when he said, “All nations will be blessed through you.”⁹ So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.

¹⁰ But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God’s Book of the Law.”¹¹ So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, “It is through faith that a righteous person has life.”¹² This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, “It is through obeying the law that a person has life.”^{*}

¹³ But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”¹⁴ Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham, so that we who are believers might receive the promised[†] Holy Spirit through faith.

¹⁵ Dear brothers and sisters,^{*} here’s an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ God gave the promises to Abraham and his child.^{*} And notice that the Scripture doesn’t say “to his children,^{*}” as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says “to his child”—and that, of course, means Christ. ¹⁷ This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God’s promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.

¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. ²⁰ Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an

^{*} Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18.

^{*} Deut 27:26.

^{*} Hab 2:4.

^{*} Lev 18:5.

^{*} Deut 21:23 (Greek version).

^{*} Some manuscripts read *the blessing of the*.

^{*} Greek *Brothers*.

^{*} Greek *seed*; also in 3:16c, 19. See notes on Gen 12:7 and 13:15.

^{*} Greek *seeds*.

agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.

²¹ Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises?* Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. ²² But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

E. CLEARLY THEN,

1. We only find true life, freedom and a secure identity, a sense of worth, belonging and value—when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ.
2. He is God with us.
 - a) “Jesus” means, “God rescues”

F. THIS IS AT THE HEART OF WHO WE ARE AS GOD'S PEOPLE

1. This is the core of where we had to change from the past
2. This is the heart and core of what we need to continue to remember and hold to, and not be distracted from
3. This is the gospel
 - a) The hope and assurance and freedom of the Gospel
 - b) And at the same time the warning of the Gospel
4. There is only one means of security, belonging, meaning, happiness and hope
 - a) If we miss it, we miss all these things
 - b) If we mislead others, we lead them away from these things
5. So it is vital for our well-being, the health and wholeness of our lives, the well-being of our hearts and minds
 - a) The well-being of our congregations, and our denomination, and the entire body of Christ

* Some manuscripts read *and the promises?*

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6. That we not be bewitched and diverted from total faith in Christ alone
 - a) That we not trust in anything that claims to supplement or improve or add to that pure and simple faith
 - b) This includes, as it did in Galatia, not blithely accepting or getting carried away by what Christian teachers and writers might say, especially when they claim to have something different and urgent that will give us new light or meaning and security for our lives
 7. In our day and age it is all too tempting for leaders and teachers to get carried away with their own seemingly brilliant and unique ideas
 - a) Which with positive responses and pats on the back, book sales, growing attendances and income can be a great lure and source of bewitchment, for the author and the followers
 8. This is in part, what Paul was facing
 - a) And he didn't let it go by passively
 - b) He patiently, persuasively, diligently and repeatedly—including at times urgently and stridently—argued and warned against such misleading teachings
 - (1) **Which he termed good news that was not good news**

Galatians 1:6-9

⁶ I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ.* You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News ⁷ but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

⁸ Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. ⁹ I say again what we have said before: If anyone preaches any other Good News than the one you welcomed, let that person be cursed.²

* Some manuscripts read *through loving mercy*.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ga 1:6-9). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

G. KARL BARTH WAS VERY CONSCIOUS OF SIMILAR TENDENCIES IN OUR TIME

1. And he wrote boldly and clearly against such wrong thinking and teaching

It is clear that evangelical theology itself can only be pneumatic, spiritual theology.

Only in the realm of the power of the Spirit can theology be realized as a humble, free, critical, and happy science of the God of the Gospel.

Only in the courageous confidence that the Spirit is the truth does theology simultaneously pose and answer the question about truth.

Theology becomes unspiritual when it lets itself be enticed or evicted from the freshly flowing air of the Spirit of the Lord, in which it alone can prosper.

The Spirit departs when theology enters the room whose stagnant air automatically prevents it from being and doing what it can, may, and must be and do.

.....this theology does not muster the courage and confidence to submit itself fearlessly and unreservedly to the illumination, admonition, and consolation of the Spirit.

It refuses to permit itself to be led by him into all truth.

...One moment theology stands in out-and-out fear of the Spirit; in another it plays dumb, perhaps pretending to be better informed or else becoming obstinate in open opposition to him.

As soon as the Spirit begins to stir within it, it suspects the danger of fanaticism; or it may rotate in circles of historicism, rationalism, moralism, romanticism, dogmaticism, or intellectualism, while "round about lies green and pleasant pasture."

He the Holy One, the Lord, the Giver of Life, waits and waits to be received anew by theology as by the community. He waits to receive from theology his due of adoration and glorification.

He expects from theology that it submit itself to the repentance, renewal, and reformation he effects. He waits to vivify and illuminate its affirmations which, however right they may be, are dead without the Spirit.³

³ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, 1963, p. 55-57

H. AS PAUL MAKES CLEAR IN GALATIANS 5:1-5

5 So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.

² Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ I'll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey every regulation in the whole law of Moses. ⁴ For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.

⁵ But we who live by the Spirit eagerly wait to receive by faith the righteousness God has promised to us. ⁴

I. WHEN WE TRUST IN CHRIST ALONE

1. And let the Spirit lead us in that simple but pure faith

- a) We are given that freedom from the problems other distractions bring, and the accompanying eagerness to wait confidently for the true righteousness God has promised
- b) And to know that we are truly, completely, and totally accepted as his beloved people
- c) The true Israel, the inheritors of the promises to Abraham and all mankind

II. SO WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS WE TEND TO CLING TO

A. WHAT ARE OUR SECURITY BLANKETS, OUR BANNISTER RAILS, RELIGIOUS OR OTHERWISE

1. What material things do we look to or depend upon to make us feel safe and secure, today and tomorrow?
2. What beliefs, ideas, or practices, do we rely on or cling to in order to feel spiritually and emotionally at peace and secure ?

⁴Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ga 5:1-5). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

3. What do we look to, to give us a sense of belonging, and self-worth?

a) To deal with our daily fears and worries?

b) To make us feel ok with God, ourselves and others?

4. As John Powell comments, our daily choices often reveal the answers to these question;

When something small and passing goes wrong, life questions us about our maturity and perspective. In this way there is a constant dialogue of questions and answers into which our lives daily invite us. ...In every reaction there is a self-revelation.

Our reactions always reveal our attitudes, for better or for worse. The real question is whether we are ready to listen to and to accept this daily revelation of our own inner depths. If we truly want to get to know the attitudes and the vision that are writing the scripts of our lives, all we have to do is listen to our emotional and behavioral reactions. They will always tell it like it is, if indeed we want to know it like it is.⁵

III. JOHN POWELL

A. BEFORE CONCLUDING I'D LIKE TO READ A BIT FROM MORE FROM JOHN POWELL,

1. and his book *The Christian Vision—The Truth That Sets Us free*

a) Coming from a Catholic background he gets to the heart and core of identity issues, and the gospel

2. He speaks about carrying his arthritis ridden mother up and down the stairs of her home. He writes;

The routine was predictably regular. We would descend several steps, and then Mother would extend her hand and firmly grasp the banister. The dialogue that followed always went like this;

“Mama, you have to let go. We can't move on unless you let go.”

“I'm afraid you'll drop me.”

⁵ John Powell, S.J., p. 84

“If you don’t let go, I’m going to count to three and drop you. One... Two...”

Mother always let go after the count of two, and then we could descend several more steps. However, after we had progressed several more steps, we rehearsed the same procedure and dialogue. Mama would grab the bannister and I would warn her of her impending doom if she didn’t let go.

On one such occasion, I reflected that the exchange between my mother and myself must be something like the exchange between myself and the Lord. Of course, he’s got the whole world in his hands, including me, and he’s moving me along to my desired destiny. However, I keep grabbing and holding on to the “security banisters” that help me feel safe.

Jesus reminds me that we can’t move along as I hold on so tightly to the little gifts, possessions and achievements that are part of my security operation.

I hear him clearly asking me to “let go....,” but out of my ever-honest stomach comes the painful whimper, “I’m afraid you’ll drop me.” I am frightened at the prospect of open hands. What if I do say the “yes” of surrender? What will happen to me?

Security is a such a deep need in us, isn’t it? We have all those trembling and disquieting questions pulsing through our nerves and muscles. What will happen to me if I let go? Will I have enough...?And so I hold on tightly to my security banisters. They make me feel safe—but they keep me stationary. They are an obstacle to grace.

The Lord must smile upon me as I once did upon my dear little mother, who was afraid I might drop her. He must want me to meet my nervous, tremulous question about “enough” with a comforting but challenging, “Trust me, I WILL BE YOUR ENOUGH!”⁶

⁶ John Powell, S.J., *The Christian Vision: The Truth That Sets us Free*, Argus Communications, Texas, 1984, p.85-86

CONCLUSION:

A. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE IN OUR STRUGGLES TO FIND OUR IDENTITY, TO FEEL HAPPY AND SECURE IN WHO WE ARE, AND OUR FUTURES

1. Jesus came to give us our true identity as sons and daughters of God, loved, adopted and included in his life
2. He has dealt with our past mistakes and independence from God
3. He has lived our lives for us perfectly, and share his life of complete faith and faithfulness towards the Father with us
4. Through the Holy Spirit we are led to continually identify those areas where we are looking to other things ahead of God for our identity and security and self-worth

a) As Karl Barth put it,

to stop circling around in rotate in circles of historicism, rationalism, moralism, romanticism, dogmaticism, or intellectualism, while “round about lies green and pleasant pasture.”⁷

b) The Holy Spirit is always there prompting and directing us, leading us repeatedly back to Jesus Christ

c) Encouraging, urging and enabling us let go of everything else we cling to, and totally trust in Jesus to hold on to us and bring us into the secure embrace of the Father, where we truly belong

d) The only place we can really be our best selves, and find true and everlasting love, security, peace and meaning in our lives

B. PRAYER

⁷ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, 1963, p. 55-57