

June 23, 2019

What Our Relationship Is Based On

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

I must admit that I am always drawn towards the Epistles of Paul as giving us a picture of the first century church. In his letters, and the one that was read this morning, that portion of his letter to the Galatians, he is trying to help this new thing called a church understand itself. And I believe that even at this point, he is trying to put into words what he himself has been dealing with, as one who had lived his life as a Pharisee, who understood the law to be given by God in order to lead the people that live a life in relationship to God. And the right relationship with God.

And so, having lived his whole life this way, until he had his conversion experience. The law was that thing that monitored how one should live one's life, and it dictated how that relationship should go. And he lived his life that way. It was based on that. And he had known and understood that the view of the diaspora, as they came together in the synagogues, it was the law that held them together. It was the law that helped separate them from the other people of the cities where they lived. And so, it was difficult to get people to begin to understand in the same way that he did that they were now freed from the law, even though the law still had meaning.

And he is trying to explain that in his letter to the Galatians. Now understand that he has been through Galatia. He has established a church there. He had spent some time, a great deal of time teaching and preaching in that city. And yet, still the people are trying to understand who are we? What is our relationship really based on now that we are told that we're not the law? It's not that covenant that was made so many centuries ago. What do we do now? How do we live our life? What is that relationship that we are called to? And Paul is trying hard to explain that, as he himself is trying to understand the same thing.

And he says that the law was a disciplinarian, the law was a custodian, the law was that which helped us to know and understand right and wrong. But it wasn't the true relationship with God that God desired. It was something that helped us to know and understand sin. But it was not what we thought it to be, a tool in order to give us a righteousness of our own. It is not something that helps us or is able to make us have a righteousness that demands God to be in relationship with us.

Because he now understands that with the giving of Jesus, with the giving of the son of God, and with the sacrifice that Jesus made, that there is a whole new relationship that has been offered to not only the Jews, but to all people. He understands that the relationship that God longs for with all of creation, certainly with all of humanity, is a relationship of family. It is a relationship that is based on one, being created in the image of God, and two, the sacrifice of

Christ and the coming together in Christ of humanity and divinity. And the call for everyone to have a reflection of that relationship. Relationship that was called by Jesus and others, relationship of father and son. It's a relationship of family. And that is based not on just creation and blood as we understand family, but on faith.

One who hears the Gospel, one who hears the story of Jesus, of what God has done in and through Jesus as the Christ, the son of God, the Savior. Is now called to open oneself in faith to receive the presence of God in one's own life. It is in the giving of the Holy Spirit. It is in the story that goes beyond the resurrection to the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is given to the followers of Jesus as something that stays with them, that is a part of who they are. And Paul understands, and has seen with his own eyes, as people are baptized as they have heard the Gospel, as they are drawn to this new knowledge and understanding of who God is and what God wants for creation.

As they are drawn to that, both Jew and Gentile, that as they come forward to make that commitment. To say, I believe. I want to be a part. I want this Gospel, this gift of salvation that You have proclaimed. That in that baptism God acts powerfully in that individual, and we see not only in the individual, many times in the whole family that is represented. That they now have been changed. They have been, if you will, transfigured, as they have received the Holy Spirit in them. They now see their relationship with God and with one another as something very different. Not based on being afraid of not following the rules, or being outside of those rules, but with the certainty and a knowledge that the love of God is so overwhelming that God has decided through Jesus Christ, through the giving of Holy Spirit to be present with each of us. And the way that Paul often puts it certainly in his letter to the Romans, but also in Galatian, he has adopted us! He has adopted us as his children.

That's the relationship that God desires with each of us. I want you to be my son. I want you to be my daughter. I want the love that we have for one another to be based on the love that you have received, with the life you have received, for the spirit you have received. I want it to be based on gratitude, I want it to be based on love and caring. I want you to be able to see one another as brothers and sisters. I want to create something in the world where we can have peace, where we can have understanding, where we can have justice, where we can have mercy. And it's based not on the whims of humanity, in this society, or that society, but is based on the very law that justice and mercy of God, as we have witnessed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the relationship that God wants for us.

Too often, we still revert to the law. We revert to what we think we can control. I can't really control God's love for me. Sometimes I feel like I can't really control my love for God. Sometimes you have questions, sometimes I have doubts. Sometimes I don't understand the fullness of God's love for me. I don't often understand why I'm able to see others around me with the same love that God has for them. I don't understand why things don't go the way I think they ought to in my life, or in the lives of the people around me. If God knows them so much, if they are family. If they are sons and daughters, then why is their suffering? Why is

there pain? And we revert to, you know, just give me the law! Give me the things that thou shalt do and thou shalt not do, and maybe I can live into that enough to feel comfortable.

But God wants so much more. He wants so much more for us. That was the experience I had with my father. And my mother. But my father was the one who would lay down the law. He would say what was right and what was wrong. What I was going to do and what I was not going to do. And sometimes that was not pleasant. I always remember when I start thinking in these terms, of the year I graduated from high school. And I was so happy to be out of high school. And I knew that my father, especially both my parents, but my parent wanted me to go to college. And that was always kind of on my mind. And I was thinking, you know, I'm going to have this summer. And then I'll start college in the fall. Isn't that the way it's supposed to work?

And I get the mandate from my father. Oh, by the way, you will go to a summer class at Marshall University. As a matter of fact, you're going to two. That was not fun to hear. To get up, the first summer after graduating from high school, and having eight o'clock calculus class. I was a glutton for punishment. I took that class. And then three days, that was five days a week, by the way. And then three days a week I took the first English class. To this day, I'm not sure how I concluded to take those two, but that's what I took.

And I was so angry that my first summer of freedom was now taken up with college classes. And what I finally came to know and understand, and I knew it from the beginning, but I didn't want to accept it, was that my father wanted better for me than he had for himself. That he wanted more for me than even I wanted for myself. And he thought and he was right, he had a plan. That if I would just follow the plan, I could do so much better than he had done. Although he was a wonderful dad, if you read my June newsletter article. You know, I have the greatest respect for my dad. He taught me so much. But I wasn't always ready to hear it, I wasn't always ready to accept it. It took some time as I traveled along the path to really accept, understand, and respect what he did for me.

And I'm pretty sure that's where most of us are in our relationship with God. Sometimes God calls us to things that are hard. God calls us to things that we're not sure we want to do. God calls to things because He sees in us the ability to become so much more than we have been. And knows that if we take that path, we will truly become greater children. That we will have better than we want for ourselves. And that is the relationship that God wants for you.

So, when you have these feelings and ideas that this is hard! That sometimes God is calling me to do things that I don't want to do, to go and see someone that I don't necessarily want to see. To be reconciled to someone that I'm still angry with. To reach out and to give to someone who is in need, even though I'm not convinced that they're going to use it wisely or in a way that is befitting the gift. God says to me and says to us, you know, do it anyway. Not because it's law. Not because you're afraid not to. But because it's the right thing to do. Because it sets us on a path of understanding God more clearly. Because it leads us further along the path of becoming the child, becoming the person that God sees in us and knows us to be at heart. And knows that as we take this step, then the next step's going to be a little easier.

And as we come to know and understand the word of God, the presence of God in our life. The love that God gives, and the freedom that God gives to us, that we become better people. That we truly reflect the image of God in which we were created. That we can live by a law that is written on our hearts rather than on stone outside of ourselves. It is about who we are becoming. It is about how God sees us. It's about being baptized with water and the Holy Spirit in order to be adopted as sons and daughters. That we may walk a path guided by God to that destination that we know is home.

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