

**Pentecost 5**  
**June 19, 2016**

*“Children of Our Heavenly Father through the Pure Gospel”*

**GALATIANS 3: 23-29**

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**B**efore this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. <sup>26</sup> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

When you drink water you want it to be pure. You do not want it to be contaminated with pollutants that could make you sick. How foolish it would be for me to take a bottle of water, remove the cap, pour out some of the water and then add polluted water to what had been pure.

Well, the dear Christians in Galatia were being told that it was not good enough to have the pure salvation, and pure forgiveness and pure peace with God that was theirs through Jesus. They were being told they had to add something to what Christ had done to make it better.

The devil is a master at deceiving us and leading us to think it is not good enough to be a child of God through Jesus Christ and baptism. He tries to convince us that you need to add something you do to be a true believer and true child of God.

On this Father's Day we ask ourselves the all important question, "What does it take for us to be dear children of our heavenly Father?" Do we become God's children only through Christ or must we add something to what Jesus has done to make sure we are God's children? Let's look more closely at the words we just read to you to see how we are children of God not through something that we do that is impure but through Christ alone and what he has done which is 100% pure and perfect and complete.

**The pure Gospel and Old Testament law**

Some of the people who were Jewish Christians had a hard time giving up keeping the laws of the Old Testament when they became Christian. For personal reasons some decided to still keep some of the laws. This was OK. But then they went too far. They started teaching that to be a true believer and be a first class Christians it was necessary to keep Old Testament laws such as not eating pork, being circumcised and worshiping on the Sabbath day.

The Apostle Paul describes what it was like to be under these laws when he writes, "Before faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed." The Old Testament believers who looked forward to the coming of Christ had to keep the

Old Testament laws God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. They were like chickens locked up in a chicken coop to keep them safe. The chicken coop is good because it keeps the chickens safe at night when raccoons and possums and coyotes roam around looking for a tasty meal of fresh chicken.

God wanted them to stay close to his promises of a Savior. That is why he gave them these laws. This past week I was reading in my personal devotions in Exodus about the elaborate clothes the priest had to wear when they offered sacrifices to the Lord. Whether it was the clothes of the priest or the design of the tabernacle or the blood that was sprinkled at the altar, everything pointed to Christ and the pure sacrifice he would make for the sin of the world. God gave them dietary laws such as not eating pork to mark them as different from other nations on this earth to keep them away from the false gods and false religions.

Listen again to what Paul says about the purpose of these laws. "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." The Greek word that is used twice for "put in charge" and "supervision" is the word "paidagogos." The paidagogos was a tutor or schoolmaster, usually a slave, who helped the Greek boys learn their lessons at school. He was like a babysitter or nanny.

Our next door neighbors have hired a nanny to take care of their little boy Jeffrey. The nanny will play with him, let him explore things, take him out in a stroller, and now that he is walking, watch over him as he explores things. Once the boy gets older he won't need a nanny to care for him.

God's Old Testament people were like little children who needed the law to fence them in and supervise them and keep them focused on the Messiah who was to come. "Once faith has come we are no longer under the supervision of the law." The people needed Old Testament laws to protect them as they looked forward to the promise of a Savior. Once the promise had been fulfilled and faith was fulfilled with the coming of Christ, the laws were no longer necessary. Perhaps you have an app on your phone that can lead you to a place where you want to go. Once you are there you no longer need the phone to give you directions.

You see then how tragic and sad it was that certain Christian Jews wanted to still keep the laws of the Old Testament even after Christ had come. They wanted to continue to keep them and use them to convince themselves they were truly God's children because they added the keeping of these laws to what Jesus had done. You know the formula. Christ but nothing equals everything. Christ plus anything equals nothing.

### **The pure Gospel and children of our heavenly Father**

As a child of your heavenly Father you are richly blessed in this life and for all eternity. You depend on what Jesus has done for you, not what you do to make yourself worthy. What comfort we find in these words from Paul about being children of our heavenly Father. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ." It does not say we are all God's

children regardless of what religion we follow or what we believe. You are only a child of God through Jesus Christ your Savior. Jesus himself said so clearly, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me."

A few verses after this Paul writes these words about being sons of God or children of God. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." You have the full rights of sons.

This full right of sons is truly amazing when you think of how often we have rebelled against our God and sinned against him even when we were little children. We did this in many different ways. Maybe you didn't always respect and honor your father as also happened to me. On this Father's Day I am thankful for the father who loved me and cared for me. I was far from being a perfect son. Why is it that certain moments when you failed to love your parents as you should come back to haunt you even to this day? Who of us could ever begin to claim: "I deserve to be child of my heavenly Father because I have done such a good job of respecting and loving my earthly Father?"

God sent his Son for you to redeem you. He sent his Son to bear the shame and guilt of your sin. He did this so you could be his dear child in this life and for all eternity. That is the message of the pure gospel. That is what Christian faith is all about. You cannot add to it to make it more pure or you will only destroy it and contaminate it.

And then there is the blessing of our baptism. "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Baptism is not something you do for God to show you are a child of God. Baptism is something God does for you to make you a child of faith. Over all these years of your life God's word has brought you Christ and created faith in your heart to believe. This is also true of baptism. It brings you Christ and creates faith to believe. Through your baptism you are clothed with Christ.

Here is what Martin Luther said about this in his lectures on Galatians. "In Baptism, then, Christ becomes our garment... He is the divine and inestimable gift that the Father has given to us to be our Justifier, Life-giver and Redeemer.. Paul teaches that Baptism is not a sign but the garment of Christ, in fact, that Christ Himself is the garment. Hence baptism is a very powerful and effective thing."

Do you remember the story Jesus told about the lost son? Sure you do. The son goes as far away from home as possible to get away from the father who dearly loved him. He totally messes up his life. But then he comes to his senses and returns home hoping he can earn back his father's favor by becoming a hired servant. He comes home to his father and confesses, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called you son." Do you remember what the father says to him? He says nothing! He tells his servants to bring the best robe and put it on him and a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet and orders the them to kill the fattened gift for the feast of all feasts.

Here I come to my heavenly Father with nothing to offer him, nothing except my filthy rags of sin and unrighteousness and my messed up life. He offers me everything by

giving me Jesus his Son and wraps me with the robe of his righteousness. I was baptized when I was a tiny baby in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I wore the same baptismal gown that my father wore. It was hand-made for Carl August Degner by his aunt for the day of his baptism. On that day in September 1947 Steven Carl Degner was made a dear child of his heavenly Father and wrapped with the robe of Jesus' righteousness. I speak of that blessing in my life because that is the same blessing also in your life. That's the message of the pure gospel: children of God our Father through Jesus his Son and through the blessing of Holy Baptism.

Because we are children of God through a pure message of the gospel, we enjoy a very special relationship with other people who have also become children of our heavenly Father through Jesus. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you all are one in Christ. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." There aren't different levels of Christians. There aren't first class Christians and second class Christians. There aren't distinctions by race or gender or economic status. Because the message of the gospel, the salvation we have in Christ, is pure. We can call Christians all over the world our brothers and our sisters in Christ Jesus. That blessing of being dear children of our heavenly Father is pure because the gospel is pure. Amen.