

## „Put on Christ” Gal 3:25-29

**<sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Gal 3:25-29)**

The words that we just heard are only a few verses from Paul's letter to the Galatians. A few verses from much longer argument. Besides in his argument Paul uses the well know story about Israel's patriarch Abraham.

We have been talking recently that in the church we are guilty of using our own jargon, which sounds so familiar to us, but may sound strange and hard to understand to those who are outside of the Church.

These are very important verses from the Paul's letter to Galatians. But, to be honest, for me it seems that Paul, too, was using some kind of a jargon, which was well known to him and to his readers, but not to us, at least, not anymore.

**“But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”** Sounds like a good message. We are free. **For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.** Just try to picture it, putting on Christ, and then answer, what does Paul mean by these words?

**There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female.** How about that? Neither Australians nor Latvians, neither parents nor children. What is this about?

**If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.** If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, his heirs. What is he talking about?

It doesn't make much sense unless we understand what a point is Paul trying to make in this letter and how does he use the story of Abraham to illustrate it. Let's try to unpack them both.

First, what is the point Paul is trying to make? In this letter he is dealing with the very core of the Christian faith. Justification through faith. Paul went to Galatians and brought them the Gospel that “God, to whom man can find no way, has in Christ opened up the way which man may and must go.”

It means that in Christ we have an access to God. Regardless of who we are. Not as to the judge, but as to the gracious Heavenly Father. We can have Him, the Creator of Universe as our Father.

He wants to be our God and bless us as only He can bless. We just need to trust His promises. Just trust. Accept them in faith and they are yours.

However, when Paul had left, other teachers, the Jews, came and they began to teach that the faith alone is not enough. That we cannot be true children of God, we cannot receive His promises, unless we do at least something.

What they had in mind was circumcision. Paul was afraid that God's gift could be lost for Galatians, if they will try to earn God's favor instead of accepting it with thanksgiving in faith.

That's why Paul wrote this letter, where he as emphatically as possible stated that there is nothing we can or should do to earn God's favor, nothing would make up for all the wrong we have done, spoken and thought, rebelling against God's order and offending Him by our foolishness. Remember, the last week we talked about just a few of our debts before God.

Only God Himself can chose to come to us and we can only receive all that He gives as a gift through faith, or reject it. To make his point even clearer to his listeners Paul used this very familiar story from the Old Testament, the life of Abraham, the famous father of the nation of Israel.

Approximately four millennia ago Ur of Chaldeans was, probably, the largest city of the world. God choose to call Abram, one of the citizens of Ur and asked him to follow wherever God will lead him, promising to bless Abraham and his descendants, and through his *descendant* to bless also all the families of the earth.

Abram listened to what God was asking and he followed where God led him. It wasn't easy. He had to go to countries he would chose not to go. His life was threatened not just once. The important thing about Abram was that regardless of all these circumstances around him, "he believed the LORD, and God counted it to him as righteousness." (Gen 15:6)

This is of the ultimate importance! Abraham trusted God, and that – his trust - made him righteous in God's eyes. His faith made him acceptable for God. What a wonderful, comforting message. Not performance, not works, but faith.

We may think about Abraham as holy man who never did anything wrong, but lived a holy life, that's why God favored him, that's why his story is written in the Bible. Not at all. The Bible reveals very realistically that he was just a man as

one of us. With his own weaknesses, there were times when he was scared and his faith faltered, his family life, when we read about it, was quite a mess, and so on.

It was his faith, his trust to God that make him pleasing in God's eyes. That's why Abraham is used as an example of a righteous man. Not because of his faultless performance, but because of his trust to the Lord. His faith made him the father of all faithful.

When Paul, using the story of Abraham as an example, had illustrated that the faith and trust is what God expects from us, he also tried to explain what is the role of the Law, the role of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel at mount Sinai. Do we need to obey them fully to get things right with God?

Paul makes few points in this letter. First, the Law was given more than 400 years later after Abraham had received God's promises. Second, the Commandments were not given to annul these promises, they were not given as an alternative way to earn God's favor. As Paul explained it, "the Law was added because of transgressions". (Gal 3:19) That is, to show us clearly what our lives are like when seen through God's eyes.

The Commandments are nothing else but descriptions of God's design for our lives. When we learn what is God's will for our lives, then we can realize how much our lives differ from what God intended them to be.

When we think about the Commandments, usually we try to skip the first three and go to those who describe our relations with other people. But first three show what our relations with God are designed to be.

God is Creator. We are his creation. We are to allow Biblical God to be our God. If He is a potter and we are pots, then He determines what is the meaning and purpose of our lives, and what kind of lives we are supposed to live. He and not us.

It also means to acknowledge that we receive everything from Him. Everything. Our lives, our identities, our families, our nations, our environment, our opportunities, our talents and abilities. Everything.

It means to acknowledge that all of this is given to us as a gift so that we can serve with all we have and all we are to peoples in our lives. Not pursuing our own good, but their good, not treating what we have as our, but as our Father's possessions.

We are not owners of our lives. We are more like brokers, managers of God's goods, and we are mandated to act in His likeness. Giving and serving sacrificially, costly, in a way that transforms the world around us.

When the Commandments remind us of our shortcomings, we are compelled to seek for another way to endure God's final judgment. On our own we'll fail miserably. Without any chance.

Think about it. We usually have in our minds only what happened recently. I haven't done anything terribly wrong today, and yesterday... But God lives outside of time. He has before His eyes everything we have done wrong during our lives.

Not just deeds, dirty thoughts, shameful passions... All of this is as an enormous debt, incomprehensible and there is no way for us to reduce it. With each day we make it larger and larger.

This is what the Law, a guardian shows us. But then Paul writes that **"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."** He is referring to our lives. When we hear the Gospel that all our debts are forgiven, then by hearing we also receive the Holy Spirit which gives us the faith. The faith, as a trust to God, puts us in the right relations with God. We trust in Him, not in our performance anymore.

But what does it mean, that we are no longer under the Law? Does it mean that we can ignore the Ten Commandments? No. Not at all. The Commandments are and remain God's will for our lives, Creator's guidelines for us, and this is not going to change.

But when we have the faith that in Christ all our sins are forgiven, then our conscience is freed from accusations of the Commandments. When we hear them accusing us, we can boldly say: "So what? I know that I haven't done everything right, I know that I have done much wrong, yes, I have sinned, but... I trust God's promise that because of what Jesus did on the cross, my debt is forgiven and God is pleased with me."

Our conscience can be good again, even if our lives are still a mess. For if we trust God's promises, the Law cannot accuse us anymore before God. It will show what we have done wrong, but God won't hold us responsible for it. He had put our responsibility on Christ. This is what it means that we are not under guardian anymore.

Paul goes on: **"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."** Paul writes the sweetest thing possible. In Christ you are God's children, through faith. You. Yes, you. For when you are baptized you have put on Christ. This sounds strange for us, but it's not complicated at all.

At Jesus time clothes was more than just clothes. Looking at someone's clothes you could say what is his social status. The change of a status came

together with the change of clothes. This is why Paul quite often uses this metaphor – putting on Christ.

But there is something more we need to see. Paul doesn't say that you put on the clothes of Christ. He actually says that in our Baptism we put on Christ Himself. We are not children of God on our own. No! We are children of God only IN Christ through the faith. When we are baptized we literally put on Christ.

It's not us anymore, we have put on our new identity, children of God. That's who we are. That's our new identity. That's why there is this ancient practice to give a new name when you are baptized. As Christ is the Son of God, we also are God's children when we are IN Him. When God looks to us, He sees His Son Jesus Christ.

He doesn't see our sins, He doesn't see all the injustice we have done, all the greed we have experienced, all the adultery we've been involved. He sees only Christ, His beloved Son, His holiness, innocence and beauty. What a good place to hide our past! In Christ. In Him our old sinful life is invisible before God's eyes.

That's not all yet. Paul goes on. **“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.”** Sounds a little unrealistic. Have you seen babies or adults before and after baptism? Do they change in a way that they are not anymore male and female? From my experience I can tell you that they remain the same.

What then Paul means when he mentions all these antitheses? Lately these verses have been misused to argue that when we are in Christ, there is no difference left between male and female and between their God-given unique responsibilities. As if Paul was talking about some kind of a new order in a family or a society which is brought forth by the baptism.

As we already talked, Paul's concern in this letter was justification through faith. He wanted to protect this most precious God's gift by all means. He wanted to show that nothing we do, nothing we are, neither our nationality, nor social status, nor gender can change our status before God, when He graciously accepts us as His own children in Christ.

The Jews thought that we have to be circumcised to belong to God. That we have to become like Jew to belong to the chosen people. What about those who were Gentiles, how about the women? They can't be circumcised.

This is what Paul is saying. Regardless of who you are, the rich or the poor, the last among sinners or the first, male or female, husband or wife, parent or child, citizen of non-citizen, old or young, famous or unknown, sick or healthy, employee or employer, or un-employed... it doesn't matter! When you are baptized, you are

in Christ. You are God's child. You. Forgiven, loved, cherished, worthy, unique – so precious in your Father's eyes.

Does it change our social roles? We can say so, in a way. Think about it. You know that when you trust Christ promises, the Law cannot accuse you anymore. In Christ you are made God's own child. God Himself has claimed you to be His. If you won't be perfect, your Father will still love you and accept you. He will forgive you and will welcome you. Just trust Him above all.

If we believe this, what do we want for our Father? That's simple. When someone loves us so much and gives us so much we want to make Him happy. When we are God's children in Christ through faith, we want to live as God's children.

Then we strive to be as good husbands and wives as we can, as good parents as we can, as good children as we can, as good citizens, employees and employers as we can. Just to make our Father happy and proud of us. Just to express our gratitude. We can say that it changes the way we live out our social roles.

The last piece. **“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”**

That's again about you. When you are baptized, you have put on Christ. God promised that through the descendant of Abraham, namely, Christ, all the families of the earth will be blessed. You are in Christ, and this promise refers to each of you. God has chosen you, He has made you His own, so that through you He can bless others.

Remember, you are walking blessings of God for people in your life. Serve them as Christ has served you, be a blessing to them as Christ has been blessing to you. Because in Christ you are God's beloved child. Nothing is going to change it. Amen.