

Last week we began to look into the New Testament letter written by Paul to the churches in Galatia. We learned last week that the people who were attending these churches in Galatia came from Gentile or non-Jewish backgrounds. After Paul founded these churches there were some evangelists who then came to these churches after Paul left and said that to become Christian one had to become Jewish first.

This meant that the males were required to be circumcised and everyone had to abide by the legalistic rules found in our Old Testament. Paul, we read from last week, was furious at the Galatians for accepting this teaching concerning becoming Jewish before becoming Christian. Paul made a very strong appeal that faith in Jesus Christ is based on faith before any obedience to the law.

We now are going to move into the third chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Read Galatians 3:23-4:7

Begin by watching the following YouTube video:

"Get Unstuck from that Label" – Julian Kyula

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_BUxQFwrCU

We all have labels placed upon us. Some of these labels we are happy to accept. For me, I am happy to claim the labels of Husband, Father, Christian Pastor, South Carolinian (Sandlapper), Clemson Graduate. Some labels are placed upon us because of our personality. I am happy to claim the following: Fun loving, Dependable, Spontaneous, Inclusive. But then there are those labels which are placed upon us by people who try to tear us down for whatever reason. I have been called by others Demonic, Manipulative, UnAmerican, unChristian.

I know what it is like to have nasty things said about me and I am sure you know about having nasty things said about you as well. So I invite you to take some time now and grab a pencil or pen and write down some of the labels placed on you. Positive and not so positive.

Like our opening video showed, we are all given labels. We are given labels when we are in school. You may be labeled a jock, or a book nerd, or a princess or as alternative. We label by where you go to school or if you are homeschooled. We label based on what our family looks like to others.

As adults we place people into categories based on how much money we make or where we live, our jobs, our lifestyle choices, our religion, our political party, our gender, our race, our sexual orientation. As we move through the campaign we hear about the women vote and the Hispanic vote and the African-American vote as if people of one race or gender all think alike. We have lots and lots of labels that we like to place on one another.

Labels play a prominent role in what Paul had to say to the Christians in Galatia. Paul says that before faith in Christ comes a symbolic imprisonment. And how are we imprisoned before accepting faith in Christ? We are imprisoned, according to Paul, by our labels of one another.

For Paul that meant labeling people as Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. But Paul says that having a relationship with Jesus Christ means that those labels that we so easily throw out at one another mean nothing. Paul says in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female because we are all one in Christ Jesus.

Paul says that our relationship with Christ means that we are adopted into a family where the labels mean nothing. We are one family in Christ and to separate ourselves out by our labels goes against what it means to accept Jesus Christ as savior. To be a follower of Jesus Christ means recognizing that we are all adopted into this one family where the Spirit removes the slavery of labels and replaces this title with child of God.

So your important label is no longer the lists that we were invited to make at the beginning of the message. Your most important label is the one that God places upon you as son or daughter of God. All of those other labels that are thrust upon you and that maybe you even claim for yourself are not as important as the label son or daughter of God.

So this week I invite us to reexamine the lists that we so easily throw out toward other people. Before we give someone a title, we are instead invited to look at that person and place upon them first the title, "child of God." Think about that person that irritates you so much. How would it change your perception of them if before you labeled them you first called them, "child of God?"

Think about that group of people that you group together by one label. How would it change your perception of them if before you labeled them as a group you first labeled them as children of God?

Think about our own self-perceptions. Before you beat yourself up because of some label that you think you have, what would it do for your self-perception if you first claimed the title, "child of God?" You are not a "loser" you are a "child of God." You are not "poor" you are a "child of God." You are not "an outsider" you are a "child of God."

Before you think of yourself as superior to others what if you claimed for yourself the title, "child of God" just like that person that you want to make yourself better than? You, over there, you are a child of God just like I am a child of God.

When we insist of using labels to describe others and when we accept the labels that are placed upon us then we are slaves. When we throw away these labels and claim and affirm the title "child of God" for ourselves and others then we are free in Jesus Christ.

So what labels are you going to be using this week? AMEN.

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-Given: June 12, 2016 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)