

Galatians 3:1-14  
Reconciled  
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell  
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Coleson Whitehead is an African American writer from New York City who retells the classic fable of the Frog and the Scorpion. In it, the Scorpion asks the Frog to carry him across the river on his back, to which the Frog says, “No way, we’ll get out there and you’ll sting me.” The Scorpion replies, “Well that wouldn’t be very smart of me; then we’d both die.” The Frog sees his logic and agrees to take him across the river. But sure enough, half way out the Scorpion stings the Frog, and as they’re going down the Frog asks, “Scorpion, what’s the deal? I thought you weren’t going to do that.” To which the Scorpion responds with the popular phrase, “You do you.”

We are fascinated with questions like this: “What does *you* do?” Is *you do you*, the answer to any of life’s real pressing questions?

There is a commercial that aired recently with President Obama looking in the mirror practicing his selfie face, you know the surprised face, the awestruck face, the pucker face, *PRUNE*. He’s practicing saying February, as well as practicing his jump shot. And just as he’s sinking a pretend fade away in his office, an aid walks in, and quoting Coleson Whitehead he asks, “Can I live?” To which the aid simply says, “You do you.”

This phrase “You do you,” Whitehead suggests, is a modern example of the depth of our narcissistic culture, like *boys will be boys*, or *it is what it is*, or *haters gonna hate...hate, hate, hate*. Whitehead says that it’s phrases like *You do you* or *haters gonna hate*, reflects the self-love, flattering, me-centered world we live in. We justify our own goodness by stating that the attitudes of others who oppose us are “haters.” Do you. Do you, Napoleon. Do you, Bernie Madoff. Do you, Tom Brady. Do you, Scorpion. You can do it.

But where does “You do you” really get us? The Scriptures suggest that “You doing you” does not get us very far. For it is the Scriptures that humble us by telling us that all have sinned and fallen short. Seems your doing you, our doing us, just is never good enough. Our being us shows us just how broken you and me really are. So if the answer is not “you do you,” then what?

The Bible tells us that there is another who steps into our fractured lives, who intercedes for us and restores the fractured relationship. He is the reconciler; his name is Jesus of Nazareth—he’s the only one for whom “you do you” actually works. And as we will see in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, it is only through his faithfulness that we have hope.

**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you**

**suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?**

**Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.**

**For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**

Let me take you back a few thousand years to the event we looked at two weeks ago and paint this picture: Father Abraham, a man who was called by God to a place he didn't know, in the wilderness to wait for God. The same God made a covenant promise to Abraham to establish a relationship with him, and the way he did it was through covenant ceremony.

So here we have Abraham standing in between sacrificial animals, cut in two, to mark the significance of the covenant. As the servant of the Lord, Abraham is awaiting the invitation to pass through the pieces, sealing the oath. The covenant promise God made to Abram was that he was going to bless Abram and make his name great, he was going to give him children and land, and a future, a future filled with hope, and through Abram all nations of the world would be blessed. Those were the promises signified by the covenant, and it was for that that Abram waited for God to have him pass through, only it never happens. Genesis 15 tells us that when Abram was deep in sleep, it was God, the smoking fiery pillar who passed through the pieces. It was God who made the covenant.

Abram saw how remarkable this was; do you? By not inviting Abram to join in the covenant ceremony, God was saying to Abram, not only will I be torn to pieces if I don't keep my end of the bargain, I'll be torn to pieces if you don't keep your end of the bargain. Do you see how amazing this is? If Abram was faithful and if Abram was not faithful, God promises to uphold the terms of the covenant. The blessing would come to Abram whether he kept the covenant or not.

How can this be? Through faith. Genesis 15:6 says Abram believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Believed in what, though? What did Abraham believe that deemed him righteous? Did Abraham believe God was just a nice guy and wouldn't actually expect fidelity to the

covenant? This wouldn't be just. If a human judge just winked at guilt like this, she would be run out of town. How much less would be the God of the universe? Did Abraham believe that he would require faithfulness from everybody else but not him? Was there some sort of inside favoritism? Of course not. Did Abraham think to himself, "you do you" and that he could actually keep the covenant perfectly? You don't have to read very far before you see that's not the case either.

What was it that Abraham believed that was counted to him as righteousness? This is the absolute center the heart of the Scriptures, this is the central tension of the Bible: God's holy demands, humanity's inability to meet those conditions, and God's gracious response.

Is God's covenant promise and blessing conditional or unconditional? Yes. God's promise and blessing is both conditional and unconditional. It is conditional in the sense that God says if you keep my covenant I will bless you. With his perfect life, Jesus fulfilled the terms of the covenant and earned the blessing, and with his sacrificial death he endured the punishment, meeting the demands of the covenant, so that what is left for us is the blessings of God. Deuteronomy 6 says "keep the Commandments, do what is right in the sight of the Lord, so that it may go well with you." It is unconditional in that God says "I will bless you so that you will be a blessing, I will make your name great and lead you into the land I have promised you." Do you see the tension that exists here? Have you ever felt the push and pull between keeping the law and trusting in the loving kindness of God?

This is where we are taken to Paul's letter to the church in Galatia, who felt this tension and succumbed to it in so many ways. The Galatians were legalists in forcing others to abide by their interpretation of the law. Between the two poles of legalism and license, the Galatians were pulled towards legalism. And Paul says to them, "You foolish Galatians, does he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness?" It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham and the scripture, for seeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, and you all nations be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Faith in what, though? How are the conditions of the covenant met? The word we use for this is the word reconciliation. Paul says in Second Corinthians 5:19 that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting trespasses against them, and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. He says in Galatians 3:13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-for it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanging on a tree-so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

When God said to Abraham, "If I don't keep my word may I become like these slain animals," he meant it. Jesus Christ was our reconciliation. It was Jesus' life that became substitution for us. It was his faithfulness that stood in for our faithlessness. Jesus was the

perfect fulfillment of the covenant. Jesus lived a perfect sinless life to fulfill the terms of the covenant, and thus earned the blessing of God. And Jesus' sacrificial death fulfilled the covenant curse on our behalf so that we might be recipients of God's blessings. Now, anyone who lifts the empty hands of faith in acknowledging their need for God is counted as righteous just like Abraham, because of the faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth the Christ, the anointed one of God.

What does Jesus' faithfulness, what does his reconciliation for us do in us? First, it leads us to what Timothy Keller calls "Paradoxical Obedience." I need to take them seriously, but I am no longer bound by them because Jesus perfectly kept the law perfectly, so that when I fail, and I will fail, there is no longer condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Second, it multiplies itself within you and within your community. You think about what the practice of reconciliation did through people like Nelson Mandela. In the face of such staggering odds, such entrenched bitterness and strife, one would think that forgiveness would be too little too late, but it's precisely not the case. Jesus' sacrificial death to save us from our sin is the ultimate play, because it forces us all to realize that we are infinitely deserving of the consequences of our actions, but for another to accept our penalty sets us free in ways we could never imagine.

I was talking to a member of our church this week, and he told me the story of a failed relationship that caused him a tremendous amount of heartache. "After carrying this hurt for a time, I decided I needed to forgive this person." But by doing it, which became a visible ongoing act among his family, he enabled others to let go of the bitterness and resentment they were holding onto and forgive others. Now, he said, "most of my family looks at me sort of funny because I don't get caught up in all the drama."

The author Lewis Smedes writes, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free, only to realize that the prisoner was you." Jesus' act of reconciliation, settling the score on our behalf, enables us to live freely and share that mercy with others.

Finally, as Paul writes in Galatians, that those who are reconciled to Christ have the Spirit of him living in them. When you receive that supreme act of grace, some old part of you steps to the side; do you know what part it is? It's that nagging, relentless pressure for you to do you. Paul says that for those who are in Christ Jesus, the old is gone. Gone is the need for you to do you, gone is the need for you to base your self worth on what you can accomplish or what you can produce, gone are the labels by which you understand yourself (pretty, athletic, smart, slow, unattractive, boring). The new life by which you live is through the Holy Spirit living in you. Now your main identity trait is the righteousness of Jesus Christ who gave himself for you to have that surpassing gift.

Can I live? I can, and I do, because he lives within us. It's no longer you do you, but allow him to be for you.