

## **Receiving Now Our Inheritance Through Faith based on Gal. 3:15-29, David Jahnke, 7/3/16**

We begin with Paul pointing out that just as one's ratified will and promised inheritance cannot be annulled or changed, so it is with God's will. God promised an inheritance to his children and that promise will be kept, regardless of how good or bad they were. Paul even insists that God's promises could not be changed by God's own Law!

Paul then explains that the Law which was given to the Israelites through Moses to teach and guard them.

And that is how the Law or Word of God functions still today. But what is that Law today? In Paul's day, the Law was the first five books of the Old Testament which would be in place until saving faith came in the form of Jesus. Notice how Jesus here is not just the object of human faith but the subject of human faith. His faith and faithfulness saves and justifies. And as the Messiah of God, he would ratify the will of God through his death and he was the only one who could change the Law which he did before and after his death. Much of Jesus' sermon on the mount, his legal battles with the Pharisees and lawyers and his life in general were a reformation of the Old Testament Law. And just as he did this in the flesh before his death, His Spirit has been reforming and perfecting the Law ever since.

But whether we are talking about God's Old Testament Law then, or Jesus' reformation of it, I think Paul would still insist that no Law can ever make things right for us. We cannot receive God's inheritance through obedience. This becomes clearer when we think about what the inheritance is. It is God himself, His Kingdom and everything in it— peace which passes understanding; a kind of joy that leads to rejoicing in all things; love that never fails; the destruction of death and the victory of life!

Do these miracles come to us because we are good and obedient? Paul asked the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit and do miracles by observing the Law? Or by believing what you heard?"

More than ever, the world tries to tell us that we can get things right through our actions; that we will find the good life through the right combination of morality, intellect, work ethic and productivity.

This was where I was in my twenties. And life seemed pretty good. But there was an underlying, nagging dissatisfaction which I could not quite shake. And when that reached a pinnacle, I kind of threw myself back on what I had heard and believed about Jesus growing up. And suddenly I was overwhelmed with our inheritance; I was filled with a Spirit of peace which has never left me ever since.

I was far from righteous. I still have a long ways to go. But somehow, wondrously, even though I fall away, when I remember the mercy and power and presence of the Lord, the Spirit rushes back in and saves and starts making things right again.

Yesterday we went to see the new movie BFG about a Big Friendly Giant and a little orphan girl. The BFG hears all our whispers and catches all our dreams and wants to make them all come true and redeem the bad ones. They go to the tree which is the source of all the dreams and there they see a bad one. The girl is surprised and says, "There are bad dreams here too?" "Oh yes! That one you are chasing is the worst." says the BFG. "What is the worst one?" The BFG responds, "That dream says, 'Look at what you did! There will be no forgiveness.'"

When they go to the queen of England to get help in the battle against the child-eating giants, they make a toast to the BFG with the girl saying, "I believe in the BFG."

So I want you to listen carefully now. Do you believe what you have heard? That Jesus Christ came to you and loves you and gave himself for you? That you might know the depths of God's compassion and forgiveness? And that three days later he rose again from the dead, revealing the promise of eternal life? That his Spirit and Kingdom are near? If you really believe these things, then you have tasted the inheritance-- true freedom, joy and peace.

But if you have tasted the freedom of Jesus, are you now wanting to add something to it? Do you think that there must be more to a life made right and good and joyful? That you must succeed in your career; and provide for your family; or be a better mom or dad; and do what it takes to be looked highly upon by your peers and neighbors and friends and family; gain enough money to do x., y. and z-- the things that make for a good life..."

This was the error of the Galatian Christians. And Paul rebuked them harshly for it. All we need is faith in a Love and Mercy and Peace that are greater than all the wrongs and will thus make things right. It is through believing in these Kingdom things that their Spirit enters in and flourishes.

After the shootings in Orlando, my deep anger and sadness filled me with both compassion and passion and which came through in my Fanfare article which was somewhat harsh and pointed. I suggested a couple of things: 1. calling on our lawmakers to enact reasonable gun regulations that protect the right to bear arms, 2. reaching out in love and peace to the LGBT and Muslim communities instead of accusation and blame. All of these ethical and legal positions stem from my faith in Jesus. But I also know that I am fallen and finite and that God's Way is so far beyond any of our ethics or laws.

I certainly know that if even Jesus' new Law is not enough to justify us without his mercy, love, death and resurrection, then all of our ethics or worldviews are, of course, entirely insufficient. So I confess and all of us must confess when it comes to our ethics or politics what Paul confessed to the Corinthians, "I said this— (I, not the Lord...)"

Here is an interesting result of this humility-- knowing our finitude and fallenness should actually send us into a deeper and more constructive participation in the democratic society our founding fathers and mothers set up for us. Because we know we are all humbly seeking the universal good that none of us fully possess. We want to hear from others rather than dismiss or condemn them or avoid the matter altogether. We do not let frustration win the day when there is little progress or others get mean-spirited. We persist through the muddle of varying points of view into new possibilities! This is not only our democratic but also our ecclesiological responsibility at church.

But more than anything, this week has thrown me back to the one thing that has saved me and made things right for me time and again-- the love and mercy of God revealed by Jesus. This is the heart of God we return to again and again; what we hold fast to in our relationships and in this community and what we must proclaim time and again to the world.

My son Dietrich just had his first sleepaway camp this week. And Seth is heading off for a week in Pennsylvania. It's not easy to let them go and have a greater independence but we of course have to. We instill in them a Law of right and wrong which we hope that they will live out as a part of their inheritance. But what matters more than anything is that they believe in the inheritance which is their parents' love for them, the church's love for them and that of their Father in heaven. Our children find peace and love and comfort and hope by believing these things are metaphysical realities.

So it is with God who has shown us His way and wants us to live it out and struggle to work it out with others in this world. He grants us independence to use His gifts to reform and perfect the Law. This is all rooted, however, in the Way of Jesus. So grow in him and his teachings; then grow your participation in American society.

But the key to all of it and what God mostly wants from us to know we are His beloved children, heirs of His Kingdom. And to receive his saving love more and more every day, by believing in His Son and the Kingdom he showed to the world.

