

Text: Gal 3.10-19  
 St Stephen's  
 Sat/Sun

June 2/3, 2007

## The Healing Power of Grace

**USA Cable TV Network** has a theme for their programming, '**Character's Welcome**'. They have an obsessive/compulsive detective named **Monk**, show movies like **Pirates of the Caribbean** or series about a brilliant doctor named **House** who is always right and all character– the theme connects with characters like us.

**God has a sign across the doors** of his own house, and the sign says '**characters welcome**'. That's good, because churches are so full of characters that they actually develop **a character...**

- The 'family chapel' church – you have to marry in to get in!
- The 'Clapping hands' church
- The 'Punk-Rock' church where everyone has been pierced, tattooed or spiked
- 'We've never done it that way before' church (7 last words of a dying church)
- The church where they gave out tee-shirts with an emblem of their creed on the front. A '?' mark!

What do you think would be **a good emblem of the character of this church?** Of your family?

The **Galatian Churches** included a small church Paul planted in the city of Lystra. We find their story in Acts 14. And you get a great snapshot of their character as well...

*While they were at Lystra, Paul and Barnabas came upon a man with crippled feet. He had been that way from birth, so*

*he had never walked... Acts 14:8 (NLT)*

Paul saw the faith of this man, and **healed him**. Then look at what happened...

*When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in their local dialect, "These men are gods in human form!" They decided that Barnabas was the Greek god Zeus and that Paul was Hermes, since he was the chief speaker... the crowd brought bulls and wreaths of flowers to the town gates, and they prepared to offer sacrifices to the apostles. Acts 14:11-13 (NLT)*

*Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowds to their side. They **stoned Paul** and dragged him out of town, thinking he was dead. Acts 14:19 (NLT)*

How would you describe the character of that church? This would be the "**We are fanatical**" church! Think about their character and listen to how Paul talks to them in Gal 3...

*Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? How foolish can you be?*

Galatians 3:1,3 (NLT)

That is who they really were. **Foolish!** They were the "We will fall for anything, and fall hard..." church

But then look at this...

*Dear brothers and sisters... you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus...*

Galatians 3:15,26 (NLT)

That is who they were, too! **They were both** at the same time.

At the reformation theologians of the bible came up with a phrase

for this. It is a Latin phrase, "*simul iustus et peccator*". They said **at the same time** we are  
 saint and sinner...  
 foolish and forgiven...  
 full of character, and full of Christ

This is a core principle of Christian life. You are at the same time saint and sinner. You are bringing children to Christ in baptism. Already these children are old enough so that you see they have a will of their own. They are little characters. Now they will be his little characters. Saints and sinners.

**What do you do with people like that?** Add more law? Maybe we would. Paul's opponents thought that was exactly the way to go...

But **how does God deal with this? Add more grace.**

I was preparing my message on the middle of ch 3 in Galatians, and I noted... Paul is saying the same thing over again. He starts in the first paragraph with the phrase, "grace to you..." and he doesn't let up. This is our sixth weekend message on Galatians, about two per chapter, and all six sermons have had the same theme. In every chapter Paul returns not once but at least twice, sometimes three times – to the theme of grace.

**5, 6, 7 times in three chapters, Paul adds grace. And in our passage today he does it again.**

As we get to the middle of chapter 3, Paul **sets next to each other** two ways of salvation, obedience to the law (the Performance Plan) and faith in Christ (the Grace Plan). I have put them next to each other in columns to contrast them clearly

for you. Remember, what Paul is doing here is **adding more grace**. Let's look...

- **Means**

***Performance Plan***

"Works of the Law"

Earn God's favor

by our good works

Command: "You shall..."

***Grace Plan***

"Faith in Christ"

Receive God's favor

by Christ's good works

Promise: "I will..."

*...no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"; but the law does not rest on faith, for "He who does them shall live by them."*

Galatians 3:11-12 (RSV)

- **God's Intention**

***Performance Plan***

"make men not better but worse", (Luther)  
leading them to grace

***Grace Plan***

To pour out his mercy,  
making us not 'better',  
but 'new', Christlike

*Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins...*

Galatians 3:19 (NLT)

- **Character of My Life**

***Performance Plan***

'Cursed':

Chronic guilt, apathy,  
depression, failure,

***Grace Plan***

'Blessed':

Forgiveness, joy, love,  
guidance, grateful

Anxious for approval.

service, eternity.

*But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse...*

*Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham... through faith.*

Galatians 3:10, 14 (NLT)

Here we are...

**At the same time,**

saint and sinner...

foolish and forgiven...

full of character, and full of Christ

What shall we do? How shall we live? Pile on the law? I don't think so. Paul says, "Add more grace."

This is why we can be **compassionate** and **patient** and **tender** with each other. Because we are adding more grace. And why we can **speak the truth** to each other... Because we are adding more grace.

**God always adds more grace...** So at the same time aware of your brokenness and failures and faults, you become secure in the love he pours on you. At the same time you are tripped by your character you are gripped by his love. God just pours on more grace. That is how he melts your heart. That is how he heals your character.

Do you remember **the line from Amazing grace**, "*t'was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved*"? Grace does them both.

**God has a sign across the doors** of his own house, and the sign says '**characters welcome**'. Welcome to his grace, welcome to his family, welcome to his healing. Welcome to his life. The doors have **another sign over those doors. "Grace to you..."** That's it. Just surrender to his love. Just let go of the performance plan and yield to his grace.

And his grace will take you where you have always wanted to go.

Characters welcome!