

Who Am I?

Rich Nathan

February 14, 2010

Galatians: Free At Last Series

Galatians 2:15-21

There is a famous story told about Margaret Thatcher during the time that she was Prime Minister of England. She was visiting a Senior Citizen Center going from room to room, meeting the old people who had lived there for a long time. One older woman showed no particular sign of recognizing that she was shaking hands with a world famous politician. So, Margaret Thatcher said to this old woman, "Do you know who I am?" The older woman answered and said, "No, dear, but I would ask the nurse, if I were you. She usually knows."

It is a terrible thing to not know who you are.

I read a story recently about a tragic case of amnesia which remains a barely understood medical condition. Perhaps because it is so mysterious, it has great appeal for film writers and novelists. What would it be like to wake up and not know who you are? In the story I read Kayla Hutcheson was 19 years old when she was struck with amnesia after bumping heads with a teammate at basketball practice a year and a half ago. The teammate looked at Kayla and said, "Are you okay?" She said, "Yeah, I'm fine." Apart from a bloody nose, Kayla seemed fine. But later that night at home with her teammates she started to act strangely. One of the girls began asking her questions and they realized that she didn't know anything. She didn't know her roommates names or who they were or where she was, what her name was, how old she was, or who her dad was. She didn't know anything. Kayla's memory loss was absolutely complete. Can you imagine not being able to recall who you are?

Sidney Harris, the syndicated columnist from Chicago for many years, once said:

90% of the world's woes come from people not knowing themselves. Most of us go all the way through life as complete strangers to ourselves – so how can we know anyone else?

The first philosopher in the Greek tradition, a man by the name of Thales, who lives before the time of Socrates, said:

The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.

Who am I? Who are you? Beyond our names, our roles, our roles in our family as husband or wife, or father or mother, or daughter or son, beyond the collection of our memories, who are we?

The importance of knowing who we are, our personal identities has been the subject of repeated discussion by the greatest Christian thinkers in the history of the church. In fact, one of the great fathers of the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, from his teachings sprang some of the world's largest denominations – the Presbyterian denomination, the Reformed churches, the Congregational Church. John Calvin began his most famous work, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, saying this:

Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.

He says essentially that these two things are connected. Without knowing yourself you really cannot know God. And he further says without knowing God, you really cannot know yourself. Without staring into the face of God, you will remain a mystery to you. You cannot live a successful life; you cannot have deep relationship with other people; you cannot know God unless you get to know yourself.

I've been doing a verse by verse series from the book of Galatians. In the section that we're going to look at today, the Apostle Paul deals with the question of personal identity. I've called today's talk, "Who Am I?" Let's pray.

Galatians 2:15-21

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. 17 "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. 19 "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Let me remind you of the background to this text. The Apostle Paul planted churches throughout the Roman Empire. He had a particularly warm reception to his preaching in an area of the Roman Empire called Galatia. Galatia is today found in South Central Turkey. The Gentiles there latched onto Paul's message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. They received the gospel enthusiastically. God showed up in their midst and they were seeing miracles in the church. Everyone was happy and growing.

Then the Apostle Paul left and after he left the church to continue his preaching and church planting ministry in other places, some opponents came in and told these new Christian believers in Galatia that the Apostle Paul gave you half a message. Yes, you need to believe in Jesus Christ. We have no problem with that. But in addition, if you

want to be a full member of God's people, you also need to practice circumcision, you need to celebrate the Sabbath, and you need to keep all of the laws of kashrut, the Jewish food cleanliness laws.

So, Paul went up to Jerusalem, got the agreement of the apostles there to support his message of by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone without these additional works of the law. And you think that everything is okay, but these opponents were like vampires. You think they are dead, but they keep coming back. And this time they came back in Antioch and they put pressure on Jewish Christians in Antioch to separate themselves from the Gentile Christians. These opponents put so much pressure on the Jewish Christians in Antioch that even the Apostle Peter and Paul's dear friend, Barnabas, also separated themselves from the Gentile Christians. So Paul had to confront Peter and confront Barnabas. And we read about that last week – the great confrontation of Paul to Peter where we find the statement in Galatians 2:14:

Galatians 2:14

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Now, we don't know if Galatians 2:15-21 was actually said by Paul to Peter. There are no quotation marks in ancient Greek manuscripts. Some commentators think these were the actual words from Paul to Peter. Others say that the quotation ends with 2:14 and that Paul was extending his argument here in 2:15-21. But it all basically deals with the issue of identity. Who am I? Who are we as Christians?

This whole issue of separating yourself from another race or culture; the issue of cultural elitism, looking down on someone else's culture; I'm better than you because I am a New York Jew. You are better than me because you are Midwestern WASP. Or you are African American or Hispanic or Asian so you are better than someone else. Lifting up of our culture and putting down of other cultures, Paul argues springs from not knowing who you are as a follower of Christ.

Galatians 2:15-16

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Who I am is answered by whose I am

How do we figure out who we are? Most societies for most of history have answered the question of identity through tradition.

Identity through tradition

I am who my culture, or my tribe, or my ethnic group tells me. I just got done watching “Fiddler on the Roof” with my granddaughter. She watched it about seven times in the week that we had it from the library. I hadn’t seen it in years. The movie opens with this 19th century Russian Jewish father named Tevye saying, “Because of our traditions everyone in our village knows who they are and where they fit in God’s universe. In other words, in Tevye’s world, you are a rabbi. You are a beggar. You are a farmer. You are a husband. You are a wife. You’re a son or a daughter.”

But in the movie as Tevye’s traditions are being challenged by his daughters and their marriage choices, Tevye finally gets to the point where he screams, “No! I can’t go any farther. If I let go of this tradition, I will be destroyed.”

And that is what the Jewish Christians of Paul’s say were saying. If we give up these traditions, our identities are destroyed. We’re nobody.

Now, the way that the NIV translates 2:15-16 is really quite unfortunate. Galatians 2:15-16 is really better translated this way:

We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our trust in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Now, we’ll tackle the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in just a moment. But I want to talk briefly about the works of the law. What Paul was most likely referring to by the works of the law were markers of Jewish identity. How you could figure out in Paul’s day who was a Jew and who was not a Jew. And you could look around and say: Well, the Jews celebrate the Sabbath; Gentiles don’t. The Jews get circumcised; Gentiles don’t. The Jews keep these food laws of kashrut and they won’t eat with Gentiles. Gentiles will eat anything. And so the works of the law were Jewish identity markers that told Jewish people, “This is how I know that I am one of the members of God’s family – because I keep Sabbath and I am circumcised and I keep the food laws. This is my identity badge.” And Jews said, “Because we keep these laws, we know who we are and where we fit in God’s universe.”

Now in the 20th and 21st centuries we have blown up traditional ways of figuring out who we are. And today everyone is involved in self-constructed identities.

Identity through self-construction

The picture that I have in my mind’s eye is that every single American is busy at work chipping away at a sculpture and the sculpture is us. We are constantly working on ourselves, chipping away to form our identities and to figure out who we are. We don’t

do this by a set of traditions handed down for us by generation through generation like the Jews in Paul's say or Tevye in that little village in 19th century Russia.

In our non-traditional society, we make up our identity as we go. And so gangs offer young people in urban areas a way to form their identity. A young person gets to know who he is or who she is by joining a gang and wearing their colors. So if you are a member of the Bloods, you wear red. If you are a member of the Crips you wear blue. If you are a Hell's Angel, you wear red and white. If you are part of the Latin Kings you wear gold and black. And the gangs have developed different hand signs that let people know that they are a member of a particular gang.

In the 21st century most people are hard at work trying to construct their identity. We figure it out as we go. I read a testimony from a young man who self-identified as a trans-sexual. He desperately wanted the surgery to become a woman. He felt total disgust and discomfort with his male body and looking at his body through him into total despair. He fantasized regularly about how wonderful it would be if he was a woman and then he could have a relationship with a man as a woman. He crossed-dressed for year.

This young man became friends with a Christian, who talked with him about Christ. Here is what the young man said:

Many of us, after trying to kick the habit...find finally that the way to end the war is to surrender to the feminine desires or at least sign a truce ("go so far but no further"). But is it possible to change the desires so that the emotional release and personal fulfillment we felt (dressing as women) could be found in radically different ways...so that the dressing and feminine behavior became obsolete?

The man went on to ask himself this question:

What if I became a woman and then still felt out of place in the universe? What if becoming a woman was not a deep enough solution? What if it did not satisfy all my unfulfilled desires? Think how horrible it would be to go through the surgery and find that I was still empty! Yes, I had read of many trans-sexuals, who, after surgery, were glad they did it. But they were usually just comparing their new lives with their old ones – and anything was better than that. What if there was a way to get completely new fulfillment without having to go through the agony of sex change?

What a great question! What if you fulfilled your fantasies and got what you wanted and still were empty? What if, for example, your dream of getting married actually happened? You are no longer single. What if now you are married you still aren't really happy? Or what if you finally become a lawyer and after taking out all those student loans and everything else, you find law to be an unfulfilling career? What if after working on yourself and forging this new identity as a woman, as a married person, as a professional, you still don't like what you've constructed?

Now, we've been in this big culture war in America for the last few decades. Traditionalists constantly argue that all of this self-created identity stuff is destroying society, that we need to get back to tradition where everyone knows their place. The man is the head of the home; woman is there to support the man's dreams; kids don't speak unless they are spoken to; everyone knows their place.

The non-traditionalists strongly oppose this. They say, "We love the breakdown of traditions where each of us is free to go our own way. In fact, the only reason why we are still so unhappy in America is because we haven't blown up enough traditions. We are still boxed in by traditional views of maleness and femaleness and sexuality. Oh what a wonderful day it will be when we get a pill that will enable men to nurse their babies. We have to blow it all up. We have to go even further down the road of destroying tradition."

The Apostle Paul takes a totally different approach to the issue of identity than that offered by the Jewish traditionalists of his day, or the non-traditionalists of 21st century America. Paul is neither a traditionalist nor a non-traditionalist. He is not a conservative or a liberal. Instead, Paul gives us a totally different basis for personal identity. And it is an identity built on a relationship with Jesus Christ. Look at me with verses 15-16:

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our trust in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Three times Paul speaks about the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in these two verses. And eight times in this brief passage of seven verses Paul mentions Christ. And what Paul argues is that we Christians don't find ourselves by adopting traditional roles in society, although you are free to adopt a traditional role, if you want to. And we Christians don't find ourselves by throwing off traditional roles and becoming a non-traditional, although you are free to be non-traditional, if you want to. We find ourselves by belonging to Christ.

The answer to who I am is only found by discovering whose I am. In other words, who am I identified with? Who am I in relationship with? With whom have I taken my stand? Who do I belong to? Who has my deepest commitment? And who is most deeply committed to me? I find myself only in relationship to the one who made me and gave himself for me.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor during the Nazi takeover of Germany. And Bonhoeffer resisted the Nazi takeover of the Christian church. And because of his resistance activity, he was thrown in prison and was eventually executed right before

the end of the war. Bonhoeffer wrote a wonderful poem from prison titled “Who Am I?” And I want to read it to you.

Who am I? they often tell me
I would step from my cell’s confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country-house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I would talk to my warders
Freely and friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really all that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as through hands were compressing my throat,
Yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,
Trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

Who am I? this or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? they mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

Bonhoeffer’s answer to the question “Who am I?” is the same as the Apostle Paul’s.
“Whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.”

I can’t answer the identity question by looking inside of me. I can’t answer the identity question by just choosing to act and work on myself. I can’t answer the identity question by listening to what everyone else says and adopting a bunch of traditions. I

answer it by belonging to Jesus Christ. Do you belong to Christ? Can you say with Bonhoeffer, “Who I am, thou knowst O God, I am Thine”?

Who am I? Paul says:

I am justified

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our trust in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Three times in these two verses Paul mentions the word “justified.” What does it mean to be justified? Let’s break this down.

First of all, thinking about this in its logical order:

I am in need of righteousness

Galatians 2:21

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

The problem that you and I have in life is that we lack righteousness. And the Christian gospel is the way to supply us with the righteousness that we lack.

You say, “Righteousness? I live in the 21st century, Rich. How relevant is it to talk with me about righteousness at all? I never think about that. It is such an old term. As a 21st century person I am not interested in righteousness. I am interested in being young. I am interested in being hip. I am interested in having a hard body. I am interested in being cutting edge, tech-savvy. But righteous? Who wants to be righteous?”

And the answer is, “We all do!” Whether you live in the 1st century or the 21st century, we all are secretly seeking righteousness. All of us as human beings are aware of falling short of some standard, whether the standard is the self-imposed standard of what we feel we ought to be like, or if it is societally imposed. We are all aware that we don’t live up to standard. We are all aware that we don’t live up to standard. We are all aware that we have blown it. And that is why every human being from the beginning of time engages in so many excuses and rationalizations and dodges for our bad behavior. And it is not like society trains you to make up excuses. We just naturally do it.

Let me give you some real excuses. Here are some real excuses that children emailed to Santa for behaving badly:

1. I thought my dear little sister would have liked to ride the bus alone.
2. I promise, Santa, I didn't know my little brother's arm did not bend that way.
3. I popped Cindy's balloon with my bb-gun because I thought I saw a bug on it.
4. I pushed Tommy off the swing to save him from a huge bee.
5. I only wanted to see if the baby could bounce.

Here are real excuses that people give for missing work:

1. I had a heart attack early that morning, but I'm all better now.
2. I donated too much blood.
3. My dog was stressed out after my family reunion.
4. I was kicked by a deer.
5. I contracted mono after kissing a mailroom intern at the company party. You should post some sort of notice to warn others who may have kissed me at the party.
6. I tripped over my dog and was knocked unconscious.

Here is a real politician's excuse: In 2008 Peter Allan, an Australian elected official, resigned from office following reports that he visited a local brothel and then submitted the expense claim for the visit for reimbursement. His defense? He didn't know it was a brothel. He thought it was just a strip club.

I am in need of righteousness. You are in need of righteousness. That is why we make up excuses. What does righteousness mean? Righteousness means right-relatedness to someone. Being in the right with someone. And we followers of Christ know that the one we need to be in the right with, the one we need to be rightly related to is God. I'm in need of righteousness.

The text goes on to say:

I am justified

Now, to be justified simply means to be declared in the right with God. Justified is the opposite of being condemned which is to be declared in the wrong by God. You and I were not in right relationship to God. But God, as a matter of his own grace, declares you to be in the right with him. He renders the verdict that you are right with him.

On what basis does God declare you to be in the right with him? Here is Paul's answer:

I am justified through the faithfulness of Christ

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our trust in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by the

faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

The Greek here in verses 15-16 could be translated that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. But most commentators today believe that the Greek is much better translated

We are justified “by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.”

Now, of course, Christ must be the object of our trust. Paul says that in verse 16 when he says:

So, we too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus.

But focusing on the faithfulness of Christ rather than our faith really follows the whole trajectory of Paul’s argument in the book of Galatians. You see, Paul’s argument is that you and I are in right relationship with God totally as a matter of God’s doing through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. When you focus on your faith as the basis for God’s acceptance, what do you end up doing? You turn your Christian faith into a new work of the law. You look inside yourself and say, “Well, do I believe enough? Oh, my gosh! I’ve got some doubts. Maybe I am not really right with God because I can’t keep these doubts pushed away. I don’t believe 100%. I only believe 90% or 84%. And I start getting really anxious about the weakness of my faith. I should believe better. What’s wrong with me? After all of this time, why do I struggle with believing?”

It is because your faith is not the basis of your right relationship with God. The basis of your right relationship with God is the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The fact that Christ faithfully lived before God and obeyed where we don’t obey, believed God where we don’t believe, and, walked faithfully all the way to death, even death on a cross of our sins. Faith is simply our response, our resting upon, our reliance on Christ’s faithfulness.

Why am I right with God? Because of what Christ did. Not because of what I do, or what is going on subjectively inside of me. And I simply must receive what Christ did, rest on it, trust on it. Look away from myself and look at him.

I said this in different words a few weeks ago when I said that becoming a Christian means that you have gone to a movie theatre and you are watching a different movie than the movie you thought you were going to. Before you were a Christian, the movie that you attended was a movie with you as the star. The movie was all about your dreams and your relationships. You were the writer and you were the director. And you filled the screen. Once you become a Christian, you are just a supporting character in a movie that stars Jesus Christ. He is the director; he is the writer; he is the star. The focus of your attention is not on yourself. The focus is on the star, the central character, Jesus Christ.

Is that how you see your life? Christ is the star and you are wrapped in his story? This world is not about you. It is about the working out of Christ's purposes.

Let me give you another word picture because you still don't really get it. The other day during my own devotions I was meditating on Psalm 23 and the opening line with reads:

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...

I closed my eyes and pictured myself as a sheep eating grass with other sheep. I began to think about all the things that threaten me; all the possible dangers to me as a sheep – wolves coming, storms. But every time I felt afraid, I looked up from eating grass and I just looked in the direction of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And I knew that it was his job to protect me. I didn't have to protect myself. I just had to look up and glance at him and I would be okay.

Do you understand how peace comes into your life, friends? Just keep looking away from yourself to Christ. He is your Shepherd. He is your Protector. You don't have to be self-protective, or defensive. The basis for your right relationship with God is the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, not the strength of your subjective believing. I am justified.

I am new

Galatians 2:19-20

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul says that when you come to Christ not only are you set free from all of these laws and traditions as a way of establishing your own identity, when a person comes to Christ not only are you set free from cultural superiority and lifting yourself up and establishing your identity based on your culture, your country, your nationality, your ethnicity. But when you come to Christ you are set free from you. The biggest problem we have, the greatest burden that's on us is us – just dragging around the weight of our own drives, our own lusts, our own pettiness and jealousies and disappointments.

Paul says when I came to Christ, I was set free from me.

I read to you a little bit of the story of that trans-sexual a few minutes ago. This man went on to say:

I saw that my transsexualism made me totally self-absorbed. To overcome the limits of my body's maleness took enormous concentration and an enormous amount of attention. As a result, I became totally self-centered, always looking at my needs and problems. I was of no use to anyone else. I did not have the

emotional resources to help anyone else. By turning away from transsexualism, and turning to Christ I became useful to others.

What happens, Paul says, when we come to Christ is that we become new.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I've moved from a me-centered life which is all about my needs, my dreams, my wants, to a Christ-centered life. And if you don't understand that, you don't get the Christian life.

I don't know if you are familiar with the name Copernicus. But Copernicus was the astronomer who communicated to the Western World that the earth was not the center of the Solar System, that the sun was the center of the solar system and that the earth revolved around the sun. It created a revolution called The Copernian Revolution. It totally shifted the way people thought about what it was like to live on Planet Earth. Wow! We're not the center? We revolve around something bigger than us?

That is what Paul is saying. Your identity, friend, is found as you revolve around someone bigger than you – namely, Jesus Christ.

A couple of years ago I was at Yale University participating in a roundtable discussion of politics and religion. One very well-known political activist said that coming to Christ didn't change one iota of his politics at all. He said nothing at all changed about my politics when I came to Christ. I spoke up and said, "How could that be? Because when Christ comes into a human being's life, it is like a bomb is set off inside and every single aspect of life, every molecule is rearranged. How could Christ not touch your politics and rearrange them even as he rearranges your morals and rearranges your relationship with God, with others and with your self. How could he not also touch this area of life?"

I heard a story about St. Augustine, who lived at the end of the 4th century, beginning of the 5th century. St. Augustine had lived a really wild life before he came to Christ. He was very promiscuous before he came to Christ. He was walking down the street and an old girlfriend walked up to him and said, "Hi there." St. Augustine said hello and kept walking. She yelled after him and said, "Augustine, don't you know me? It is I." Augustine turned around and said, "O, I know you. But it is not I." In other words, "I am different. I am not the man that I used to be."

Friend, do you know this truth in your own life? You are not the man or woman that you used to be? Do you know this one? Has Christ ever put a bomb at the foundation of your life and rearranged, totally blown everything up and rearranged it around himself?

If you don't know this kind of change, where you can say, "It is not I! I am not the woman or man I used to be."

And it is not that there has just been a couple of changes or a little bit of behavioral reform. But I am radically different. I have a new center. My life now revolves around Christ, then you need to ask yourself, "Am I really a Christian?"

Who am I?

I am loved

Paul writes:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The whole idea of a gracious God, who doesn't condone our sins, nor does he visit our sins upon us, but who took the initiative to rescue us and gave himself for us by enduring the shame and pain and awfulness of death on a cross, and who broke the power of death through the resurrection. There is absolutely no parallel to this in any other religion or philosophy in the history of the world.

Stephen Neil, who is an Anglican Bishop and a great scholar of religion said:

If any other religion has anything in the least like the doctrines of Incarnation and atonement, I have yet to find it.

No other religion says that you can totally screw up, you can totally be a screw up and as a result be precisely the kind of person for whom Christ died and whom God loves. I may be disgusted with myself. Other people may be disgusted with me. But the Bible tells me that I am loved by God. And Christ died not just for the world, he died for me. I am the beloved of God, the apple of God's eye. Can you say that about yourself? Let's pray.

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Galatians 2:15-21

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