

Galatians 3:27–29

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Fred Harrell

May 11, 2025

Wearing Grace: A New Identity in Christ

I was raised Baptist, and in my church we didn't baptize babies, only people who were old enough to choose it for themselves. So for me, baptism was exciting, a time when a person would get dunked in a huge "baptistery," and that was drama I was here for. Hair wet, people freezing in the air conditioning, the pastor up there in his white robe looking like the Lord Jesus himself. About all we knew was, this was seriously better than listening to a long sermon.

I've come to see the beauty in both ways people come to baptism. When babies are baptized, like my own children were, we witness the wonder of a love that claims us before we even know it. It's this powerful moment where parents and the whole church make promises to surround that child with love and faith. And when someone is baptized later in life, choosing it for themselves, there's a different kind of beauty — a moment of boldness, a declaration of trust and identity that's deeply personal. Both are sacred, both are moving, and both remind me what a privilege it is to speak to people who've passed through those waters. Baptism is nothing short of radical.

When Paul writes to the Galatians, he's talking about a full-on identity shift. Baptism, for Paul, wasn't just a ritual. It was resistance. It was a way of saying: "I don't belong to the old ways anymore. I belong to Christ."

Baptism as a Defiant Declaration

Galatians 3:27–29 is a short passage, but it packs a punch. Paul says if you've been baptized into Christ, then you're *clothed* in Christ. And if that's true, then all the old ways of dividing people up don't hold anymore.

He says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female." That was radical. He's saying: whatever used to define you — your background, your status, your gender — those aren't the things that give you worth anymore.

As you well know, people still judge each other based on race, gender, sexuality, money, popularity, Instagram followers. We still label, sort, exclude. Baptism calls us out of that rat race of a game.

I remember baptizing someone for the first time. Her name was Leslie. She was a freshman in college. During our conversations leading up to her baptism she said, "I think I can finally relax if I get baptized". I think she meant she can finally stop playing the game of comparison. To root her identity in baptism. Clothed in Christ.

Have you ever walked into a room and wondered if you were enough? Have you ever stared at your screen, wondering if anyone sees the real you? Have you ever felt like you had to perform just to be loved? You are not alone. And you are not forgotten. You are clothed in Christ.

This is a word for all the adults in the room as well. Even now, at 62, I still catch myself wondering, "Am I enough?" I still compare myself to others. I still have days where I think I've messed it all up. And in those moments, I have to come back to this truth: I am clothed in Christ. That hasn't changed. And it won't.

A Presbyterian View on Baptism

In our tradition — Presbyterians — we believe baptism isn't something you earn. It's not a reward for being good. It's grace. It's God saying, "I claim you. You're mine."

We baptize infants because we believe God loves us before we even know it. And we baptize teens and adults because that love is still waiting for us, no matter when we say yes to it.

Baptism is one of the clearest ways we know that we belong to Christ. It's not just a symbol, but a deep sign of connection — a way we participate in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. It's a beginning, a launch, a naming.

When we talk about baptism being a "seal," think of it like a mark that says, "This one is mine." In ancient times, people used wax seals to close letters, stamping them with a symbol that showed where they came from and who they belonged to. We still do that sometimes today for weddings or special events. Baptism is like that: a seal that says, "You are God's. Forever."

It's not magic. But it is powerful. It tells the truth about you: you are already loved, claimed, and enough. You don't have to perform or hustle to be worthy. You just have to remember who you are.

What Does It Mean to Be Clothed in Christ?

Paul says you've "clothed yourselves with Christ." In ancient times, what you wore said everything about your status. Your clothes could say: I'm a slave, a soldier, a citizen. So Paul is flipping that: now, what you wear is Christ.

You don't wear shame. You don't wear fear. You don't wear your worst mistake. You don't even wear your best performance.

You wear Christ. You wear grace. You wear belonging.

Maybe you've heard things like, "You don't belong here." Or, "You're not enough." Or you've felt like your body, your story, your brain, your identity don't fit the mold. Paul says: You are clothed in Christ. You belong. Period.

When I was a kid, one of my favorite things to do was play dress-up. My siblings and I would raid our parents' closet, slip on their oversized jackets and shoes, and parade around the house like we were grown-ups. Of course, everything was way too big — but that was part of the fun. We'd wobble and trip, but we loved it. And over time, we grew up into clothes like that.

That image sticks with me when I think about what it means to be "clothed in Christ."

Baptism gives us a new identity — one we may not fully fit into yet. But we grow into it. We stumble around sometimes, but we keep becoming. It's a lifetime of learning how to wear grace.

No Longer Jew or Greek, Slave or Free, Male and Female

When Paul says these lines, he's not erasing our differences. He's erasing the idea that any of them make one person better than another.

"No longer Jew or Greek" — he's calling out religious elitism and racial divisions.

"No longer slave or free" — he's calling out systems of economic control.

"No longer male and female" — he's calling out patriarchy and the idea that gender defines your worth.

And let me say this clearly: this passage is good news for queer, trans, and nonbinary people. It's good news for anyone who's ever been told their identity puts them on the outside. Paul says: You are one in Christ Jesus. Period.

This isn't about sameness. It's about shared worth. Equity. Belonging. Not someday — now.

Living Into Our Baptism

So what do we do with this?

It means the font at the front of the church isn't just decoration. It's a reminder that you belong to something bigger. That your life matters. That your story has weight.

It means we don't judge each other by labels, clothes, test scores, Instagram likes, or whether you sit at the cool kids table at lunch. We treat each other like siblings in Christ. It means we speak up when people are bullied or excluded. It means we stand up when we see injustice. Not because we're trying to be nice — but because we are baptized.

You are not your GPA. You are not your friend count. You are not your anxiety. You are not your worst day. You are not your parents' expectations. You are not your social media followers. You are not your relationship status. You are not your mistakes or the rumors about you. You are not the pressure to look or act a certain way.

You are clothed in Christ.

Conclusion: Remember Who You Are

Paul ends this section by reminding us that we are Abraham's descendants — heirs to the promise.

What promise? That through us, God would bless the whole world. Not just one kind of person. Not just one group. *Everyone*.

Baptism pulls you into that story. It says you're part of something ancient and beautiful and still unfolding.

So if you ever forget who you are — if the world tries to label you or define you or make you feel small — remember your baptism.

You are clothed in Christ. You already belong. And the church — this wild, imperfect, beautiful community — isn't whole without you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.