

Who or what is in control over our lives?

Galatians 2, 16-21



<sup>6</sup> know that a person is not justified by the works of 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<sup>[d]</sup> Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup> "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! <sup>18</sup> If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

<sup>19</sup> "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"<sup>[e]</sup>

There are countries in the world where people do not have any individual rights at all to decide who they want to be or how they want to live their lives. In some Muslim countries, for example, individuals automatically become Muslims because they were born in such a country. Parents therefore have no right even to give their daughter or son a name from their own culture; it must be a Muslim name. All of this is then laid down as a program for the persons life. And individuals must live as Islam dictates without any possibility of change. In Germany, in contrast to all of this, people want to grant individuals unrestricted self-determination. They believe that the right to decide for themselves is a right that the state cannot or should not influence at all. For example, on April 12, 2024, a law was passed that individuals can also choose their own gender. In this there could not be a greater contrast to those Muslim countries. In one country, the state decides on everything the individual is and does. And in the other country, the freedom of the individual is even more important than nature itself. Because the self-determination law means that the individual should determine his or her own gender, even if God has determined something different at birth. There is an important question in the background of all this. And that is, who am I as an individual anyway? And what defines my identity? The state or the desire of my heart or someone else? It seems to me that neither the state nor the heart of the individual are good advisors and can lead us to ruin. In the beginning, none of this was the case. In the beginning, there was no contradiction between being and identity. In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve an identity that was not in contradiction to their will. They were loved by God and their self-determined will was in harmony with God's will. But through the influence of evil, these people separated themselves from God. They wanted to be independent and above God and thus plunged themselves and their descendants into the abyss of God forakeness. Since then, we humans have been in contradiction with ourselves. Since then, we have been asking ourselves the question: Who am I actually? At the heart of today's sermon text is precisely this question. The first Christians had been misled. They were Christians but also wanted to live according to the law. On the one hand they wanted to be pious Jews and on the other hand they wanted to be Christians. They

did not understand that God had created a completely new identity with us humans through Jesus Christ in his history. And that was precisely the confusion and identity crisis of the first Christians. Which is for eg. behind the rhetorical Christian: "Should I sin more to promote Christ!" These people had no understanding of the fact that Christ gives us a completely new identity. They thought that faith in Christ was simply a new law with different rules that could somehow be combined with the old ones. For the law-abiding Jews of the time, it was not enough that Christ alone is our identity completely. They wanted to know where man would play a role with his decisions. So something else had to be added to Christ. But it is precisely at the point where man gets involved with his decisions or with his supposedly good works that everything starts to falter. Paul has to protest vehemently. He had learned through his own life that it is not enough to do good works or to be a completely pious person. God himself has to intervene. God's story has to be part of our life story. And we must die with Jesus with all our being and with all our identity. And in exactly the same way we must rise with Jesus as new people. Our self-realization story is the incarnation of Jesus. And when Jesus really becomes human, we rediscover our identity as human beings. So it is not self-realization that is important, but the realization of Jesus in our lives. In Jesus it becomes clear who we are and what God wants from us. This became clear to Paul when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. From then on he only said: "I am in Christ!" And when the Son of God became man, he became one with me! I know many of our church members were born as Muslims. That is why their ID cards have a Muslim name. Many of these church members say that they had no choice in this matter and are therefore looking for a new identity and a new life. Of course, the freedom of the individual is a high priority. Everyone wants to make their own decisions and wants to shape their life, their job and their family in freedom and live as undisturbed as possible by the state. This freedom of the individual is indeed a very valuable asset that we have to protect and respect. Even if we believe that people make mistakes, we must not dictate what they should or should not do. And yet I notice that even people who are born free and have all the freedom to decide are haunted by inner constraints and by misfortune and sadness. They are all searching for the meaning of life and for happiness. And that seems to me to be the case even with people who have all the freedom to decide for themselves. It seems to me that the problem of our identity and our search for self identity lies deeper. It does not lie in the state or in our personal history. The problem is that our identity is broken from the start.

At home I have a bicycle tube. This tube is covered with at least ten patches. On one particular bike tour I was out without a spare tube and because the road surface was particularly bad, I kept getting a flat tire. The longer I went, the more it became clear that this tube with its patches was absolutely useless. The patches could do nothing to stop the recurring flat tires. We humans are a bit like this bicycle tube. No matter how good we are and no matter what we try, an annoying hole will always appear in our lives. Even if the hole is only a tiny hole, sooner or later all the air will disappear from that little hole. Well, we can patch the hole. We do that again and again, with great effort. Most of the time, we humans are so unwise that we simply hide the hole from other people. Someone who has a sin and says: "The main thing is that no one notices" is just like someone who just wants to keep riding with a flat tyre! The other person will perhaps try with all their might to patch that hole. And anyone who has ever tried to stick a second patch on an old patch knows how annoying and pointless such an undertaking can be. It is exactly the same with us humans. We keep trying to correct our mistakes ourselves. But that doesn't work at all and always ends in total failure! Paul tells us very clearly: Something new is needed. Christ must be the new identity of us humans. We must put aside the old tube of our lives and something completely new is needed. And the wonderful thing is that we don't have to fix the old tube of our life before we come to Jesus. We can just come like we are. You don't have to get your life under control before Christ can be there for you. You don't have to find yourself before you can be a Christian. Jesus is there for you precisely because you

can't get your life under control on your own anyway! And because without him you have lost your true identity. You don't have to solve your alcohol consumption, your drug addiction or your marital problems before you come to Christ. No! Christ came to you precisely because otherwise your life would be broken. And the wonderful thing is that in Christ we don't lose our identity at all, but find it through Christ! This new life in Christ has an impact on my whole life. The factors that are otherwise so decisive, such as wealth, health, nation, gender, origin or social status, are not as valuable as my being in Christ. And this Jesus protects me. Just as a citizen of a particular country can expect the protection of the state, Jesus protects me from the power of Satan, sin and ultimately from death. Regardless of everything that can happen to me and in my life, I know who I am: I am a Christ who died. And I am a Christ who rose again. That is what decides my life. Amen.