

One Gospel, One Family

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[0 : 00] For those of you who have not been in this space before, I welcome you. This is the place where our Brooklyn Parish meets and worships. It's a new location, and I give thanks for our volunteers who work tirelessly to manage the issues that come with any new space.

We also have a new sound system that we're doing our best to figure out, and so these folk are working really hard. And so I'm very thankful for Adam, who has not sat down for, I don't know how many hours you've been here, but hard at work.

So God bless you, brother, and I'm so glad it's you and not me. But we're gathered here because we want to take a look at God's Word. And we're in a series now.

We've been doing this for the last couple of weeks, looking at Paul's letter to the Galatians, which in 10 years of Church of the Advent, I can't believe that we've never really done a deep dive into this book, but now is the time when we're doing that, and we're doing it because we talk as a church about being a gospel-centered community.

And so we want to know from time to time, what does that mean? We want to remind ourselves, what's the intent of those words, and how is that meant to shape our identity as a community?

[1 : 13] What does it mean to be a gospel-centered community? And so we're in Galatians, and we're in this interesting place, chapter 1, verse 18, through chapter 2, verse 10. Most people would not list this among their favorite Bible passages, right?

That this weird explanation of Titus and why Titus wasn't circumcised and the meaning of that. It seems it's marked at a great job, but it's even kind of clumsy and hard to read.

People have found this to be a frustrating and hard-to-understand place in the Bible. And yet I'm excited about it, and I think it's fantastic. And the reason is because it's a perfect passage for us to consider as we bring both parishes together, because it's all about the foundation for unity in God's family.

It gives us the reason, the rationale, but the underlying biblical truth for why we, as all these people from all these different backgrounds and places, and all these different political affiliations and all of that, how we can nevertheless be completely unified as one family.

So the point of the passage is this, and we're going to break this out into parts. But the point of this passage is essentially this, that there is only one gospel that can make one family out of all people.

[2 : 32] There's only one gospel that can make one family out of all people. So let's pray, and then we'll dive in. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for your promise again and again and again that your word does your work in the lives of your people, that you send it out and it does not return empty, that it accomplishes all that you desire for it to accomplish.

And we know that you have a plan and an intent for how to use this time in our hearts, and we pray that your word would be like a surgical instrument. And we pray that you would challenge those who have become too complacent, also that you would comfort those who are overwhelmed with challenge.

We pray that you would illuminate your word, and that through it we would see the face of your son, Jesus Christ. And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Only one gospel.

Why is it important to point that out? Why not many gospels? Paul had come into Galatia, and he was preaching this radical, strange, revolutionary message.

He was preaching this truth that the grace of Jesus Christ was not just meant for the Jewish people. He was not just the Jewish Messiah, but he had actually come for all people.

[3 : 49] He had come for Jews and Gentiles. And that because of this grace, because of the cross, circumcision, which had up to this point set apart the Jewish people, is irrelevant now.

It's irrelevant. And so this primary marker of cultural identity and set-apartness for the Jews, Paul was declaring utterly irrelevant.

And he's essentially saying that Jesus has eradicated the difference between Jews and Gentiles, and this is part of the unfolding plan of salvation history.

It's the culmination, in fact, of the Jewish religion. So, not surprisingly, he got a lot of pushback. And it raised a lot of questions. And the biggest question was essentially this.

Here's the biggest question. Is Paul preaching the same gospel as the other apostles, or is Paul preaching something different? You know, is there a gospel version for the Jews and then a gospel version for the Gentiles?

[4 : 54] Is this even the same gospel? Or has Paul distorted the gospel or twisted it? Is he offering something that is a little more user-friendly for the Gentiles?

Maybe he doesn't want to offend them. And so he's altered it slightly. He's downplaying the importance of circumcision, right? So this is the question that Paul's confronting. And so in chapter 1, and then in the first half of chapter 2, Paul is making two things absolutely clear for his people.

Number one, he's saying that the gospel that he's preaching is not just some distortion that he got from the apostles, but this is something that he has received directly from Jesus Christ.

So if you wonder why in the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2, he's going to great lengths to say, you know, I had this encounter with Jesus, and then I went away for three years, and I barely interacted with the apostles, and even when I did, it was just Peter, and it was just for 15 days.

The reason that he's doing all of that is to tell us, I didn't receive some garbled version from the other apostles. This is something that was revealed to me by Jesus himself.

[6 : 00] So that's the first point he's making. The second point is like it. He's saying, even though I received this gospel from Jesus, it's not a different gospel than you've already heard.

He says, then in fact I know this because when I went and I actually shared what I had learned from Jesus with the other apostles, they didn't add anything to it. All right, so they didn't say, well, you've got it partly there, but we need to talk about this, that, or the other.

We need to talk about circumcision. He says, no, no, no. In fact, they didn't add anything to my understanding of the gospel, and they simply offered me the right hand of fellowship. That is to say, they endorsed my preaching of the gospel, and then they sent me out to be a gospel preacher to the Gentiles, just as they are preaching to the Jews.

So that's the flow of the passage that's happening. And so Paul is saying, I got it directly from Jesus, and it lines up with the teachings of the other apostles. Right? It's rooted in the life and the ministry of Jesus, and it aligns with the teachings of the other apostles.

So this is the first point I want to dwell on for just a little while, that there's only one gospel. And the way we know that we're dealing with the real gospel, as opposed to a counterfeit, is that first, it's a message that is rooted in the life and the ministry and the teaching of Jesus Christ.

[7 : 16] And number two, it aligns with the teachings of the apostles, which we have in scripture. Right? And if either of those criteria are missing, you're not dealing with the Christian gospel, you're dealing with some other religion entirely.

It's all or none. Now, why does this matter? You know, we keep coming back to doctrine, and some people say, why quibble about doctrine? Right? You can have your emphasis, I'll have mine.

Well, here's one of the reasons it matters. You may have heard of Leslie Newbigin, who was a missionary, British theologian, pastor, missionary. And Leslie Newbigin wrote a book that was profoundly influential on me, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

And in this book, he talks about his days as a young missionary in Hindu culture. He spent decades as a British missionary among Hindus. And here's what he says in his book.

He says that he would go every week to the Ramakrishna mission. And he would sit with the monks in this mission, and they would open the gospels, and they would open the Upanishads, and they would study these together.

[8 : 21] Right? It was kind of an interreligious dialogue. And he says this went on for a long time, these weekly meetings at the Ramakrishna mission. And he said, as you walk around the Ramakrishna mission, you see on the walls all of these portraits of all these great religious leaders from all different religions.

And not surprisingly, one of the portraits was of Jesus Christ. And he says that every year on Christmas, these monks would all devote that day to worshiping and honoring and glorifying Jesus Christ as one of the divine manifestations that has occurred throughout history.

Now, he says you might be tempted to see this and to say they're worshiping Jesus once a year. This is a step in the right direction. This is movement. They're becoming more open to the truth of the gospel.

But in fact, Newbigin says that's not what's happening. What's actually happening? He says this was not movement toward accepting Christ as a savior or a lord.

The monks had co-opted Jesus into their existing worldview. They had taken Jesus and taken the truth of the gospel and fit it into their existing worldview and their existing religion.

[9 : 39] And now you say, okay, well, that's an interesting point. Well, here's the kicker, the thing that really got me. Newbigin says this, the more he reflected on this fact, the more he began to realize that he had done the very same thing as a Christian.

And here's what he says. Jesus had become just one figure in the endless cycle of karma and samsara, the wheel of being in which we're all caught up. He had been domesticated into the Hindu worldview.

That view remained unchallenged. It was only slowly through many experiences that I began to see that something of this domestication had taken place in my own Christianity.

That I too had been ready to seek a reasonable Christianity, a Christianity that could be defended on the terms of my whole intellectual formation as a 20th century Englishman, rather than something which placed my whole intellectual formation under a new and critical light.

I too had been guilty of domesticating the gospel. And I think that that is a powerful insight that we need to take and reflect on, that we too are constantly tempted to domesticate the gospel, to co-opt Jesus into our existing worldviews, our existing priorities, our existing agendas, and this happens again and again and again.

[11 : 00] Right? So in Jewish society, when they heard the news of Jesus, their first instinct was to co-opt Jesus into the Jewish worldview.

So you have a Jewish, the Judaizers, were advocating for a version of Christianity that was Jewish, a Jewish gospel for the Jews. Right?

Now if you live in a post-enlightenment society that enthrones reason, like Newbigin did, like we do, what's your temptation going to be?

You're going to want to co-opt Jesus and domesticate the gospel such that everything aligns with and appeals to that enthronement of reason.

In other words, we're going to want to have a faith where we can explain everything, rationalize everything, understand everything, fit everything into a spreadsheet. And if we can't have strong apologetic arguments for every aspect of the faith, then we panic.

[12 : 02] Right? We're going to want a reasonable Christianity. Right? If you live in a consumeristic society where the orientation is always to get our needs met and you can go to a 24-hour CVS and get access to any medication that's ever been invented right then and there, if we live in that kind of society, then we're going to want a consumeristic Christianity.

You know, we're going to want a version of Christianity, a version of Jesus, a version of the church that meets our needs and really asks nothing of us.

Right? We're going to want to domesticate the gospel. In a society that worships politics as the ultimate, in a society that has come to see that politics is the way to solve all the problems of the world if we can just get it right, what are we going to want?

We're going to want a version of Jesus who aligns with our political leanings. Right? We're going to want to co-opt Jesus into our political agenda and we're going to have a hard time imagining that Jesus could also love the other people on the other side of the aisle.

No way. Surely he knows how evil and wicked they are. That's what happens in a society. Right? So in this horrendous Ford-Kavanaugh hearing and appointment, right, if you aligned with Dr. Ford and you saw Kavanaugh in the light that many people cast him, you can't imagine that he would worship the same God as you.

[13 : 29] Right? If you aligned with Kavanaugh, this guy's been wrongfully accused and you couldn't believe that anybody would do this to such an upstanding man, how could God possibly bless and love people who would do something like that?

Right? And so we began to see the world in binary terms because we've co-opted Jesus. Right? In a society that idealizes romantic love, we're going to want a Jesus who says, at the end of the day, guys, love is love and that's all that matters.

Right? In all of these ways, again and again and again, we face the temptation as individuals, as a church, in a society, of co-opting Jesus and co-opting the gospel and domesticating this faith. And so we, because we face this temptation, we have to relentlessly return to two things. The ministry and the teaching, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ and we have to return to the teachings of the apostles and we have to continually be reminded that we are not meant to fit Jesus into our worldview, that our entire life is in fact meant to be fit into God's unfolding story. Right? And that's a greater, bigger, more radical gospel than anything that we could ever cook up as human beings. This idea that through the life and the sacrificial death for sins and the resurrection of Jesus, that God is reconciling human beings to himself and that God is then reconciling all people to one another as one great family with him as father.

[15:02] That that is the only gospel there is and we should never settle. Don't ever settle for anything less. Don't ever settle. So there's only one gospel.

Now I want to go a little further, just one push further, one step more. And that is to ask, okay, we said there's only one gospel but then we said that that gospel can make one family out of all people. So I want to ask the question of how. How does this one gospel actually accomplish that kind of unity and make one family out of all people? If we look at verse 3, it says this, even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was Greek.

Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Jesus Christ, so that they might bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

So what's the truth that he's defending? He's willing to risk Titus being shamed or rejected by the Jews in order to defend and protect this gospel truth.

[16:12] Well, as you are hopefully aware by now, the issue at the heart of this book is circumcision. To us, that sounds totally irrelevant. To them, it was a big deal.

The Judaizers are insisting that the Gentile converts have to be circumcised before they become Christians. It's not legitimate unless you're circumcised. You have to become Jewish and come under the Mosaic law before you can become saved by Christ.

And so Paul is teaching a counter to that, that the gospel makes circumcision totally irrelevant. Now, there's a lot of ways we could get into this, but here's the thing I want to focus on this morning. The key to this issue is understanding the difference between the moral law and the ceremonial law in the Jewish faith and in the Christian faith.

There's a huge difference between the moral law and the ceremonial law. So God had given moral laws to his people. What are some of the moral laws? Well, Ten Commandments, great place to start, right?

[17:14] So worship God and God alone, right? Keep the Sabbath. Honor your father and mother. Don't murder. Don't covet. Don't steal. These are moral laws.

And the moral law that God has given to his people, the moral laws reflect God's desire for our hearts, right? This is what he wants our hearts to be like. And because this is what God desires of his people, this is the way God still desires us to live today.

God still desires us to live out the reality, the truth of the moral law in our lives. Now, the ceremonial law has a different purpose. You know, so people look at the laws and they say, well, why are we so arbitrary about the law?

Why would we be so intense on the sexual laws that we see in the Bible, but nobody cares if we eat shellfish anymore? You know, why? And it feels like it's arbitrary.

Well, no, it's not arbitrary. There's a big difference between the moral law and the ceremonial law. The ceremonial laws had a very different purpose. These are laws about eating shellfish or pork. There are laws about menstruation.

[18:19] There are laws about nocturnal emissions. There are laws about associating with Gentiles. There are laws about associating with dead bodies. All of these laws that to our eyes look bizarre. They're all part of the cleanliness laws.

This is all about teaching people what it means to be clean. Right? And this is all the ceremonial law. And circumcision was a part of the ceremonial law. Now, what's the point of the ceremonial

law?

I said, well, the point of the moral law is this is God's desire for his people. This is the character that he wants us to have. What's the point of the moral law? Is it to be clean? It's to teach us that cleanliness is impossible because you do it as well as you can do it.

You live by these standards as well as you can live by them. You do all of the rituals. You do all of the prayers. You do all of the... You do everything you can do to keep yourself ceremonially clean. And then what happens? You still have to go and offer sacrifices to atone for your sins. And over generations, this is teaching God's people, no matter how hard you try, no matter how scrupulously and meticulously you keep these laws, you will never, ever, ever be clean.

[19 : 35] So what's the point of this entire system? It's to teach them and to prepare them as a culture, as a society, to be ready for the one sacrifice that will actually make them clean.

And if you want to read in detail how this all plays out, read the book of Hebrews. This is what Hebrews is all about. It's about how the one sacrifice that matters is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

And so what we see on the cross is that there is one true sacrifice necessary to cleanse us from all sin. So Paul's trying to help the Judaizers understand this, that through Jesus Christ we are given the spirit to continue to live out the moral law.

God's law is written on our hearts. But also through Jesus Christ the ceremonial law is done away with. It's irrelevant. So we can eat shellfish.

We can eat pork. And circumcision means nothing. And once they begin to realize this they begin to realize how radically transformative the gospel is in terms of how they see one another.

[20 : 46] Because they realize this Jew-Gentile distinction was 100% a function of the ceremonial law. And once that ceremonial law is fulfilled there is no longer any difference.

Right? So you look across the aisle at this hated enemy and you realize the wall has come down. Right? So these are the powerful words that we see in verse 6 that say this God shows no partiality. God shows no partiality. So whether people are Jew or Greek whether they're male or female whether they're a slave or free whether they're influential or inconsequential whether they are wealthy or poor whether they're an insider or an outsider whether they're educated or uneducated God shows no partiality.

No partiality. And this is the foundation of the unity that can exist in God's family. Coming to understand that God shows no partiality.

No partiality over race over gender over social standing no partiality. So the point flows pretty naturally from that idea God shows no partiality therefore neither should we.

[22 : 04] Right? And yet if you're anything like me and you look at your own heart you realize showing no partiality is a lot easier said than done. Right?

Because human beings naturally show partiality. I hope I'm not the only one. Do you show partiality? Can you think of any example where you've ever showed partiality?

Where you've preferred certain people over other people? Even for reasons that you don't fully understand? Right? It turns out that there's actually an instinct in us it's just an aspect of human nature but it's been measured by a huge body of social research.

There's a phenomenon that exists in every human society called the in-group out-group bias.

Right? If you remember your sociology classes that you took and people in the social sciences you've probably come across this.

Big body of research showing that we are hardwired to give preferential treatment to people that we perceive to be in our in-group and to view more negatively people that we perceive to be on the outside of that group in another group.

[23 : 08] Right? So the us-them thinking is hardwired into us. So research shows that you can just take a so we could take a group of people like this and I could go down the row and each of you I just flip a coin heads or tails and some of you would be in the heads group and others would be in the tails group and guess what happens?

These are intelligent thoughtful self-aware mature modern people. What happens very soon is that you began to ascribe more positive attributes to your group.

Well heads people are obviously better dressers. You know? Heads people obviously kind of got their head on their shoulders. Right? And then more negative attributes to the other group. And it happens again and again and again and it's not rational.

It's a kind of primal wiring that is just in us in our DNA. Right? So there's a lot of theories about why it happens but our focus is simply the fact that it does happen. And so it didn't take long for the Jews to develop very negative attitudes toward anyone who was not circumcised.

Right? They weren't just Gentiles they were unclean Gentile dogs. And I don't have to make the case to you for the negative attitudes that have been developed towards Jews over the centuries.

[24 : 21] It works both ways. But we see this everywhere today. Think about sports rivalries.

Right? I mean I know very little about sports but I but I know that violence among fans in college and professional sports is a huge ongoing issue.

Right? People are people are literally trying to kill each other because of sports rivalries. Right? Think about politics. Think about the hatred that exists across the aisle.

The hatred. The vitriol. Right? Think about racism. Right? Now that's a highly complicated issue especially in our country. But a part of this is driven by that in-group, out-group bias.

I prefer people who look like me who are culturally similar to me over people who are different. It's hardwired into me. Right? And no matter how much awareness I get no matter how much education I get there's this innate tendency in me toward that preference.

Right? We see it in the church. We see it in between denominations. Right? Lots of mistrust and hatred between denominations. We see it within the church in terms of age.

[25 : 31] Right? Younger people versus older people. Right? And each group thinking the others just totally missing it. Yeah. You see it and this is true in churches where there are older people. I promise.

It is true. There are people who are in smaller churches who over-spiritualize small church and they say well anybody in a mega church they're just missing it.

They've sold out. They're corporate. You know they don't get it. Right? And then there are people who are in larger churches who over-spiritualize being in a large church and why wouldn't anybody want thousands of people in their church and why would you settle for a little church that can't operate their sound system when you could actually come to a really nice big church and get all of these amazing services.

You know? And so both sort of you look at each other and you say no way! Did that just happen? Are you messing with me?

That's awesome. The sound guy has power. Don't ever forget that.

[26 : 40] So there's these tensions that exist. Where was I? I have no idea. So differences between liturgical and non-liturgical. Right? There are the people hugely spiritualize liturgical worship.

Right? And if you're not liturgical or if you're less liturgical right? There's a sense that well you're just sort of you know you're kind of a junior you don't really take this seriously you know you can graduate to our and then there are people who say the opposite.

Right? I can't believe people who need a liturgy. We just want to worship God authentically. Right? As an expression of our hearts we don't need a script for that. You know? And so there's all of these ways that we see this in-group out-group preferential treatment happening.

Right? Let's get a little more personal. We see this in our own church. Church of the Advent. Yes, this church. We see it between the parishes. Right?

I hear this all the time. You know it ranges from light joking to sometimes outright contempt between the parishes. We see it between people who live in Northwest and people who live in Northeast.

[27 : 45] You know this is weird arbitrary line in D.C. North Capital and somehow that has deeply divided people. You know in terms of perceived value worth you know whatever.

We see it between moms who work full time and moms who stay at home with their kids. I would say dads but I see it primarily in moms because that's mostly what we have. We see it between unmarried people and married people.

We see it between people who have kids and people who don't have kids. Along all of these lines I have personally heard and been a part of in some way in group out group bias in our church.

And it's heartbreaking every time we see it. Right? And so verse 6 hits us like a missile to the heart. It says God shows no partiality. Right? God doesn't give a rip about your race.

God doesn't give a rip about North Capitol Street. Right? You don't stop being white or black or conservative or liberal or living in Brooklyn or living in Columbia Heights. You don't stop these things.

[28 : 50] You don't stop working full time necessarily or stop being a stay at home parent. But what happens to all of these identities is they're subsumed into this larger greater overarching identity.

They're subsumed into the truth that in Christ you become a member of God's family. Which means you're a child in God's household. Which means when God looks at every single person in his household he shows no partiality.

Right? He loves and blesses all of his children as he does his son Jesus Christ. So with all of the focus in our culture it's interesting all of the focus in our culture now more than when I was growing up by far.

You know for the last several decades since civil rights there's been an increasing strong push toward values like understanding the value of your own identity relative to other culture groups the increase in the focus on multiculturalism the increase in the focus on inclusion and tolerance and all of these things have just steadily increased and along with these the focus on raising awareness the focus on changing legislation the focus on creating enough social pressure so that we can actually bring about change and establish a more equal just inclusive society.

This has been the dialogue for all my 41 years of life this has steadily increased and yet the fascinating thing is whatever good that has done and I do think it's done some good it has also done what?

[30 : 21] In my opinion it's done what every form of legalism ultimately does it's actually hardened hearts and I look at I look at society now and it feels more divided on all these lines and we realize that whenever you try to use social pressure and shame to change behavior you're ultimately taking an outside-in approach and that hardens hearts right?

So there's value in it but this is not going to get us all the way there right? The only thing that's going to truly unify human beings who have this innate hard wiring of bias is an inside-out transformation right?

So there's only one gospel that can make one family out of all people and when your identity is in Christ alone Jesus plus nothing right? Jesus plus no other marker Jesus plus nothing then all of the dividing walls between you and other believers start to come crashing down and that's the only way to begin to eradicate that in-group out-group bias when I can look at you and say this is my brother this is my sister because we have the same father and that's how I believe we as a community can genuinely begin to move in the direction of becoming the kind of family that God intends a family in which there is no partiality let's pray