

The Truth that creates Unity and Diversity

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[0 : 00] Father, there's some distractions. For some of us, maybe the stage is a bit of a distraction, looking like a cluttered study, sort of with a church sort of in the middle of it. For some, maybe the kids are a bit of a distraction. Father, for some of us, we just brought distractions in.

We're worried about bills. We're worried about something else. And so, Father, you know our hearts and you know the state of our distractions. We ask, Father, that you would gently but powerfully pour out your Holy Spirit upon us at this time. And Father, may you help us to hear your word.

Father, I ask that people not remember what I say per se, but that they remember your word and that your word would come and touch the very command center of their lives so that you, through your word and the power of the Holy Spirit, will make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory. And this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Please be seated. So, one of the standard problems that people have with Christianity, I hear it time and time and time again, is Christianity and slavery. In fact, many people will tell you that the Bible sort of doesn't do anything against slavery, that Christians sort of had to learn to give up slavery from some other types of sources, that the Bible just doesn't really speak against slavery. It's a very, very, very common accusation made against the Christian faith. And, you know, one of the things we need to acknowledge is, it's not always acknowledged, is that slavery is a human problem. Slavery has existed in pagan cultures, Buddhist cultures, Hindu cultures, atheist and secular cultures, and in Christian cultures. It's a human problem.

There seems to be something in human beings that desires to own another human being. In fact, you could even sort of understand a little bit about in our own culture that is very quick to announce slavery. The way often we talk about a woman's relationship to the baby within her womb actually sounds a little bit like the way a slave owner used to own a slave. But maybe I've distracted you. It's a bit of a topic for another conversation. But there's a lot of very powerful similarities behind it that would, I mean, maybe when it finally starts to dawn on the cultural elites in our culture that we talk about things in that way, it will start to horrify them. Let us pray that that will come someday. But in fact, slavery is a human problem. I've heard some statistics recently. I have no idea whether they're true. But while it's definitely not the case that, I mean, there's been other times in history when there's been a very high percentage of slaves in the culture.

In the Roman Empire, it's estimated at the time of Jesus and the New Testament church that one third of everybody in the Roman Empire was a slave. That's the estimate. But whether it's true or not, I don't know. But I've heard the claim lately in quite a few different sources that there's actually more people in slavery today than there has been at any other time in history. I don't know if that's true. But it's a claim. And in fact, one of the interesting things later on after the offertory, we're going to have a special time of prayer. And in fact, our guest speaker, Carolyn, had a role in, in fact, bringing to the West's attention the scandalous practice of slave markets existing.

[3 : 27] And if you look at her Wikipedia page, she gets a lot of stuff thrown at her because she, in fact, unveiled this terrible truth of ongoing slavery and actual slave markets in existence. So it's a human problem. But here's the thing which is very, very, very, very interesting. Many times when people complain about what the Bible says or doesn't say, it's because they've never actually read the Bible.

Sometimes if I'm dealing with a very, very, if I'm feeling very naughty and somebody tells me about all the things that the Bible says or doesn't say, I give them a Bible and say, could you show me? I only do that when I'm, it's probably not a good evangelistic technique. Because, you know, I should be trying to build bridges, not show them up that they don't actually know what they're talking about. But it's very interesting. If you turn to book the Galatians, most scholars now agree, or maybe not most, yeah, probably most scholars now agree that what, when we read what we now call

Galatians, you're reading the very first bit of the New Testament that was ever written. And if that's the case, it was probably written in the year 48, 4-8. Jesus died on the cross either in the spring of the year 30 or the spring of the year 33. We don't know for sure, and scholars can come up with one of those two numbers. If he died on the cross and rose again in the year 33, when we read the book of Galatians, we're reading something that was written 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. And it's a letter written by a man who, a Jewish man who'd been a violent persecutor of Christians, who became a Christian, and he's writing it to a group of churches which are primarily pagans who have become Christians in what we now call Turkey. And it's very interesting, in this very, very first Christian document that is now part of the New Testament, there is a consistent theme denouncing slavery. Because slavery is held up as an image of all that is wrong that Christ has come to deliver us from. So if you turn with me to Galatians chapter 2, let's look and see what it says. Galatians chapter 2, verse 1. And what's going on just before this, just so you have the flow, right? Because it's a letter, it has a beginning, it has an end. And what's going on just before this is Paul has tried to, has shared with the people that when he preaches the gospel, he didn't think up the gospel himself.

How did he learn the gospel? Jesus himself taught him the gospel. And when Jesus spoke to Paul and taught Paul who Jesus is, so Jesus told Paul who he is, and Jesus told Paul what he accomplished on the cross. And all Paul is doing is passing on what Jesus taught him himself. That's Paul's claim. And what's going on just before this is that Paul is given some historical evidence that helps to validate that claim. And here's how the letter continues in verse 1. Then after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. Just pause, time out. I know for many of you, you go, okay, that's one of the reasons I don't like reading the Bible, George. Barnabas and Titus, and I mean, I didn't even know if it was pronounced Titus or Titus. You know, who on earth are they?

So here's the significant thing. It's very significant in the letter. Barnabas was a very, very good Jewish man who'd become a Christian. Titus was a pagan who had become a Christian.

[6 : 58] And so Paul is going with a Jewish man who's become a Christian and a pagan who's become a Christian. Paul himself is a former violent persecutor who's now become a Christian. And they're going together all as brothers to talk to the home church, so to speak, in Jerusalem. Verse 2.

I went up because of a revelation and set before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, the gospel that I proclaim among the pagans in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. Just a little pause here again so you understand, like, what on earth is going on? You know, like, for many of us, our eyes start to glaze over when we read stuff like that.

So what Paul is saying, it's a very interesting thing. Sometimes people ask me, is Christianity just all about being practical or is it mystical? And the answer is yes. It's both. And what's happened is Paul has had a word from Jesus that he needs to go to Jerusalem. And at the same time that Paul has had a word from Jesus that he needs to go to Jerusalem, at the same time, something in his gut was bothering him as he just observed what was going on as the gospel was being shared.

And when Paul says that he was worried about, you know, having run in vain, he wasn't worried that he was preaching the wrong thing. What he was worried about was he just saw these trends that were bothering him. Because, you see, it's possible for somebody to very accurately share who Jesus is and what he did for us on the cross. But somehow in the whole process of doing that, well, we all know the problem, right? Don't you sometimes look at maybe a very, very big church or a big ministry and you think it's all about that guy's ego? Or can't you go and you see something else and it looks like it's been, the gospel's been communicated in such a way that they believe that they're the only Christians in the city. And you see, there's different ways that you can preach the gospel accurately, but the consequences are futile. They're vain. They're not what God wants. And Paul just has this sense in his gut, right? It's a sense in his gut and a word from the Lord that, okay, the gospel's being proclaimed correctly, but there's something that's just not right. And so Paul is saying,

I didn't get called in by the principal to come and clarify things. I went to the people who were, but he says, you know, sort of seem to be important. What he's saying is, I didn't just sort of go and talk to, I went to talk to people who can actually make decisions that matter.

[9 : 40] Because I want to try to clear this up. And now, and you can't communicate this when it's translated into English, verses three to five. In the original language, this is what happens in verses three and five. The grammar is crappy. It's missing verbs. It's missing subjects.

And what translators say, and in English, you have to smooth it up. But you know how some of us, we've gotten an email maybe, and the grammar's really bad. But you can just tell that the person is overcome with emotion. And they've become so overcome with emotion that they're not just writing really clearly. It's just like, they just got to get it out. And it's just, their heart is breaking. They're so anxious and concerned about it. And that's what's happening in the original language in verses three to five. It's like Paul goes off on an aside, and it's because his heart is breaking over what's happening. And that's why some of you, verses three to five, your translations might be a little bit different. Because translators try to smooth it over in English, and they're trying to smooth over the fact that the grammar is poor. But what's, that the heart of the matter is communicated very well in the original language, and probably in most of your English versions. Just listen to what happens. Verse three, but even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised. I'm going to talk about that in a moment, though he was a pagan. Actually, I'll say something about that right now.

I'll say something about that right now. Here's the first thing, if you don't know anything about the Bible. The Bible never teaches circumcision of women. It's not dressed, it is indirectly addressed in the Bible, and the Bible would find it to be a terrible practice. The circumcision of women is done as a way to remove any sense of sexual pleasure, and it's specifically a technique to make them chattel.

And the Bible exalts in sexual pleasure. It would forbid female circumcision. So if you're just wondering, because you're coming at it from the outside, and you think that just all religions are the same, this is one thing, when you hear this, it's talking about a Jewish right just for men that does not affect sexual pleasure, which is a sign of the covenant, that they're part of, that they belong to the covenant people, that they're part of God's people. And this whole language of circumcision is going to, I'm going to explain a little bit more in a moment about what it sort of symbolizes and why it's actually relevant to us. But you need to understand that about the Bible, that it's talking about a particular type of thing, and it's definitely not talking about something else, which is in the news off and on in our country and in many other first world countries. So go back to verse three again.

[12:39] But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a pagan, a Greek. Greek and Gentile, in both cases, it basically means non-Jews. It means, in that context, pagans.

Yet, because of false brothers secretly brought in, this sentence is the worst in maybe one of the worst grammatical sentences. It's the worst grammatical sentence in the book of Galatians, one of the worst in the New Testament. It's just a, it's where his emotion just overwhelms his ability to write. Yet, because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus 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, what, actually could you put up the first point, Andrew? The one gospel from the one Savior frees us from slavery.

First book written in the New Testament, 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's going to be repeated time and time again in this gospel, in this, in this letter. The one gospel from the one Savior frees us from slavery.

Lamentably and regrettably, it took Christians a long time for them to realize that. But when Christians led the way in abolishing slavery, it wasn't because they had to learn about humanism. It wasn't because they had to learn from secular philosophers.

[14:16] It was because they finally learned to listen to the Bible. They finally learned to listen to the word of God.

The one gospel from the one Savior frees us from slavery. What's all this stuff about false brothers and all of this type of stuff? If you just turn back, I don't have to turn back, it's on the page.

If you look at chapter 1, verse 7, some of you might remember that we, those of you who are here, might remember, if you look at chapter 1, verse 7, it says this, not that there is another one, that's another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

And some of you might remember how I explained what the, the, the distorts a very, very good word. But the, the, in the original language, the, the original word has a very, very powerful image. And the image is this, that you take something that's supposed to be at the beginning. I love preaching to screaming. Isn't it so wonderful? Anyway, that poor little kid, eh?

[15 : 21] Whatever's breaking their heart. Excuse me. Maybe he's thinking that is, he's going to have to get circumcised when he's older to be a Christian.

Listen, I mean, every guy here should be so glad about this letter. Let me just tell you, if your parents didn't deal with it when you were eight days old, this is spectacular news for the guys in the room.

The little kid, you don't have to cry. It's not going to happen when you're 12 or 20 or something like that. Anyway, if you look at, so in verse 7, not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

So the image of distort there is that you take what's supposed to be the beginning and you put it at the end. And you take what's supposed to be the end and you put it at the beginning. And I was born in Montreal and I've lived in Ottawa most of my life, so I am not an expert in horses.

But I do know that if you want a horse to move a cart, you put the horse in front of the cart and hook up the cart to the horse. You don't put the horse behind the cart.

[16 : 29] And that's the way it's supposed to be. And so what the false brothers are doing, what Paul is saying is they take the gospel and they reverse the order.

And when they reverse the order, it means it's no longer the gospel. It will just lead you into, it will keep you in slavery. Because, you see, here's the thing, I'll explain it in a moment.

But here's the thing you need to understand. And this is actually really shocking for us Canadians. Time and time and time again, the people I talk to regularly about the Christian faith, there'll be a time up when they say, oh, I'm just reading this book.

Oh, you would like this book. It's, what do they say? It's religious. Or it's spiritual. And I just, about a couple of weeks ago, somebody said that to me.

They were talking about some books that they just bought. And then they literally paused and said, oh, you'd like it. It's spiritual and religious. And I said, did you know that the Bible teaches that Jesus came to deliver us from religion?

[17 : 29] And the conversation didn't go anywhere. I mean, they just looked like that was a shocking idea to them. You see, we're very used to the idea that we meet somebody who's caught up in drug addiction.

They come to receive the gospel and God, Jesus delivers them. The gospel delivers them from addiction. Or we meet somebody who's maybe caught up entirely with making money.

And their quest to make lots of money, it's ruined their family, it's in their marriage, their family, their kids, their friendships. And that they hear the gospel and they start to have freedom and they're delivered from greed.

And we're very familiar with that. But the fact of the matter is, is that the gospel came to deliver us from religion. It came to deliver us from spirituality, which was just religion for hip people.

That's all spirituality is in Canada. It's just religion for hip people or those who want to be hip. In case you haven't figured it out, I'm closer to hip replacement than hip.

[18 : 34] So that boat left a long time for me. But so what Paul is saying here, so here's how all religion and all spirituality works.

All religion and all spirituality works. That if you have maybe the right genealogy or the right genes, but you follow the right rules and you follow the right rituals and you're in the right clubs or you're in the right organizations or the right church and you do all of the right things and then God will accept you.

That's how all religion and spirituality works. And what the gospel says is no amount of rule keeping will ever make you right with God. It's a completely and utterly hopeless task.

And what the gospel comes and tells you is that you can't possibly ever keep the rules. You can't always, you can never possibly do the right rituals. That what the gospel is about is that God sends his son and God's son, he does everything to make you right with God.

Absolutely everything with nothing left out. No religion, no spirituality, no accomplishment of mine, nothing about my race or my education or how special and unique I am.

[19 : 51] Nothing about me. Everything completely and utterly is done by Jesus. And all we can do is accept it and receive it by faith, doing nothing in our own part.

That nothing I can do next week will make God love me more or make me more saved. Nothing that I will do in 10 years, nothing that I'll accomplish in my life will make me more reconciled to God than what I receive when I put my faith and trust in Jesus.

And the entire Christian life, the gospel reverses religion and spirituality. Because what it says is that once we are grasped by the fact that from the moment of our conception in our mother's womb to the moment of our death and everything in between, that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we are completely accepted with God.

We are completely made right with God. Jesus does absolutely everything. And then when we start to live a new life, it comes out of gratitude. It comes out of love.

It comes out of security. It comes out of peace with God. So why is Paul so upset with the false brothers? Why is he so upset with this issue of circumcision?

[21 : 07] Because what these people are doing is saying, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Jesus saved. Yes, he died on the cross. Yes, he rose from the dead. Yes. You got to keep kosher. If you keep kosher, if you do the sacrifices, if you follow the Jewish holy days, if you're circumcised, if you do all of these things and you accept Jesus, then you're right with God.

And what Paul is saying is that whenever you put what should be coming out of gratitude and love and security and make up the grounds by which God will accept you, you put the cart before the horse.

It doesn't work. It's no longer the gospel. It might sound like the gospel. It might sound smarter than the gospel, but it doesn't work. It will leave you in slavery.

It will leave you in slavery. Just turn in your Bible, still in Galatians, to chapter 5, verse 1.

We're going to be looking at the theme of slavery quite a bit because it comes up about 10 times, 12 times in the book of Galatians. But look at this. This is a verse that every Christian should memorize.

[22 : 22] For freedom, Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

That's the gospel. The one gospel from the one Savior frees us from slavery. Slavery is painted an image of all that keeps us from God and all of our life apart from God.

And as that is read and as that is understood, it becomes more and more and more clear that the human institution of slavery, which is used as a sign of man's rebellion and human beings' rebellion against God, a sign that human beings are fallen and far from God, cannot possibly be an acceptable social structure.

That it is to be eradicated from the earth. Christians are always to be on the side of the slaves. No exceptions. No exceptions.

One of the wonderful things, some of you know that I had the great privilege to go to Angola. I have to sort of wrap this up now in a couple of minutes. I had the great privilege to be able to go to Angola and spend 15 days.

[23 : 47] And one of the things which was so, I mean, we just take it for granted. But it's a very powerful thing. If my Jewish friends went to a synagogue in Angola, when the Bible was read, it would be in Hebrew.

It would be read in Hebrew. If a Muslim goes to Angola to a mosque, if they read the Koran or any of the other writings, it will be in 7th century Aramaic.

When I went to Angola and I was in an urban church in Angola, I was also in an area that was with semi-nomadic tribes. And I was also in an area where there was a church plant, where in some ways it was as if it was still the year 1500.

Did I hear the Bible read in English or in Greek? No. In fact, if I went there and heard the Bible read in English, I'd go, what? What?

If you don't know, Angola, Portuguese is a European language, and there's like 70 tribal languages. Like virtually nobody and very few people in Angola speak English.

[25 : 01] What's going on there? Why is it that if we went to a church in Angola, we would not expect the Bible to be read in English? We would expect that the whole service took place in Portuguese or one of the tribal languages.

It's precisely what's being seen here right at the start of the Christian faith. Look at verses 6 to 9. We try to wrap this up. And from those... So Paul now, he's gotten his emotional thing out of the way.

The grammar starts to more or less be correct. He goes back to the fact that he'd gone to Jerusalem to see the bigwigs. And here's what he says. And from those who seem to be influential, what they were makes no difference to me.

God shows no partiality. Those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, that's to pagans, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, in other words, primarily to Jewish people, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised, that is to Jewish people, worked also through me for mine to the pagans. And when James and Cephas is what Jesus renamed Peter, James and Peter and John, who seemed to be the pillars of the church, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

[26 : 24] Very, very powerful thing. Very, very, very powerful. You could put up the next point, Andrew. We're probably going to go through these relatively quickly. The one gospel from the one Savior is to be shared with every people group.

If you could put up the next point, and I'll explain them, because I'm conscious of my time here. The gospel from the one Savior, the one gospel from the one Savior does not smother human diversity. It causes human diversity to blossom and flourish. I mean, we all know, those of you who know anything about Christianity know that there was this long, dark period where all of a sudden the Bible could only be read in Latin if you were in the West, and Greek if you were in the East. But do you know one of the interesting things? There was a really foolish article in the National Post this week about something to do with a Bible translation and little notes. It's people who know nothing about manuscript history get caught up in that.

All it does is show the ignorance of the writers. Talk to me about it in coffee time. One of the things that's so interesting is the original Christians almost immediately began to translate the Old and New Testament into other languages.

[27 : 40] Almost immediately. And what Paul is saying here is there's only one gospel. There's not a Muslim gospel and a Buddhist gospel and a Christian gospel. There's not a gospel for gay people and for transgendered and for heterosexual people.

There's not a gospel for rich people and a gospel for poor people. There's not a gospel for white people and a gospel for black people. There's only one gospel. And we're to bring that one gospel to every people group.

And it has to be made... We have to figure out how to communicate it, but we can't change it. When I had this great privilege to be in Angola, when I had this great privilege to preach the gospel to this semi-nomadic tribal group, and there had to be two translators, one in Portuguese and one in the tribal language.

And so for one of the issues in that, because I was talking to the missionaries beforehand, one of the big issues for the semi-nomadic people in terms of hearing the gospel is that they believe the world is filled with spirits. In fact, one of the problems with translating the Bible into their language is they have like, I think it's 20 or 24 different words for spirit, but they're all what we would call demons.

So in fact, when we can just say the phrase, the Holy Spirit or the Spirit from God, they can't do that. They actually have to say several paragraphs to say, this is not an evil spirit, but there's a spirit, which is not like all the other evil spirits that you know.

[29 : 02] They don't use the word evil, but all the spirits, you know, there's this new spirit that you've never heard of that comes from God. They have to actually talk like in two paragraphs to say, well, we can just say in two words.

And you see, for the gospel, for them, when you believe that the world is filled with different spirits that make you sick or give you prosperity, that even as you start to hear the gospel, you still want to maybe go to the witch doctor, but it creates a profound sense of fatalism.

Why am I not getting better? Well, it's not because I'm not drinking clean drinking water and not practicing hygiene. It's just the demons made me sick. There's this profound sense of fatalism.

And so when you share the gospel there, you have to sort of emphasize that by Jesus's death upon the cross, there's this triumph over all these spiritual forces. Whereas in our culture, that's maybe not as much of a thing to emphasize, but it's the same fundamental basic gospel translated in different contexts where we have different cultures in rebellion against the gospel in different ways, but there's the same message.

And, you know, one of the things which was so wonderful while I was at the missions conference, which was taking place right in the midst of these semi-nomadic tribal people, one of the

missionaries who was there had spent the last 10 years of her life giving them their language in writing.

[30 : 18] She didn't say, you foolish people, if you want to be really good Christians, you should speak American. She said, I've made, and she didn't say this to them, I've sacrificed my life and my career to come here to take your language, which is not written down, and give you an alphabet and a language and put the gospel in a language and I will teach you to read.

That is what Christians do. And we see it right here. There's one gospel. Peter's going to share it with Jewish people.

Paul's going to go to all the different types of pagans, but they both share the same gospel. Next slide. And my time is up.

Look at verse 10. Actually, look at verses 9 and 10 in closing. And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship.

That's in Greek the word *koinonia*, which is more than just having good feelings about each other. It talks about a profound spiritual unity to Barnabas and me that we should go to the Gentiles or the pagans and they to the circumcised.

[31 : 41] Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. You see, this means that Paul understands that when the gospel comes, Christians are to care for the poor in their congregation and outside, but it's also to have practical consequences to brothers and sisters outside of the local congregation.

That's exactly what the point is being made. The church in Jerusalem is 15 years old. Many of the Jewish people have become Christians.

They've now been severed from their families, severed from their livelihood. They've been disowned. They've lost their livelihood and they're poor. And Paul is acknowledging, yet when I convert pagans in what we now call central Turkey, I understand that we have not only an obligation for the poor on our own, but we have an obligation to send money to our Jewish brothers and sisters in the Jewish homeland to help them out.

Could you all stand? Could you put up the final point, Andrew? We didn't say it in this creed, but when you say the Nicene Creed, some people get really bothered by this, but you know what? All this I've just said, this is just this creedal thing. What does Paul say in the Bible? There's only one church because there's only one gospel. What does Paul say? The one true church, the invisible church is holy.

[33 : 09] Why is it holy? Because Jesus has made us holy. Why is it apostolic? Because it comes from the apostolic gospel. It comes, it's a New Testament. It comes from the New Testament. Why is it Catholic?

What does Catholic mean? Catholic doesn't mean Roman Catholic. It means universal. You know what else it means besides universal? It means varied. And different.

If I said to somebody, you have a Catholic taste in music, you know what it means? It means they're listening to a Bach fugue, and they're listening to hip-hop, and they're listening to maybe some music from Ghana involving drumming, and they're listening to throat singers from Inuit.

They have Catholic taste, varied taste. In Galatians, we see why the creed says what it says. The true church is one. It's holy.

It's based on the apostolic gospel. And it doesn't want to make us all alike. It wants to make us more unique. It wants Angolans to worship like Angolans, and Otowans to worship like Otowans.

[34 : 15] It wants us to eat Ottawa food and Angolan food and whatever food we happen to feel like eating. I believe in one holy, Catholic, and apostolic church.

That's what it means. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you so much that your son died the death of a slave when he died on the cross so that all who put their faith and trust in him might become your son or daughter by adoption and grace.

Father, we thank you for that substitution and exchange that he would die a slave's death, that when we put our faith and trust in him, you adopt us by grace.

Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel, who are learning to be freed from everything that enslaves us and are concerned for the slaves on the planet today that they might be free and that we do it all for your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.