

Intro: If you have been following the news this week, just like most any week you have been alive, it is not difficult to conclude that there is much unrest and conflict in our world. We have the atrocities in Syria, their civil war, and the global conversation concerning what to do about it. Throw Iran, Russia, and other global powers into that conversation. Then you have our own government on the brink of a shutdown as Washington tussles over Obamacare. Chances are you experienced conflict this weekend, whether you created it or inflicted it. (F-bombed, Princess slippers). There is much conflict in our world, and in this fallen world, we will have conflict.

So we should ask. . . What brings people together? Some common answers would probably include: Common values. Common passion. Common goals. Common love.

Trans: What if I told you the community Jesus came to build possessed all of those things?

This morning we're going to dive into what it means to experience. . .

"Gospel Unity" **Galatians 1:11-24**

The Point: The gospel builds a community that is united around the same gospel.

Trans: Here's our first truth...

I. Unity is centered around gospel proclamation (2:1-2).

- *Read 1-2.* Paul says he went up to Jerusalem after fourteen years, which probably refers to fourteen years after his conversion and roughly eleven since his first trip (1:18).
- He went up because of a revelation, which tells us he did not go there for a validation of his gospel. After all, he had preaching the gospel for 14 years!
- This seems to accord w/ Acts 11:27-30 to help with famine relief but we can't know conclusively. What we can know is that Paul did not go because the apostles in Jerusalem summoned him nor because he was unsure of the gospel.
- So why then did he set the gospel before Peter, James, & John? He tells us at the end of verse 2. "in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain."
- But wait! Are we sure Paul did doubt the gospel he proclaimed? Could he be concerned there were some holes in his presentation? No! He already told us that he received it from God and that anyone speaking to the contrary should receive final condemnation. Strong enough. Paul is confident.
- Paul's deepest desire was that the fruit of the gospel be preserved and multiplied. The endorsement of the Jerusalem church would nullify the work of the false teachers and overthrow their influence in Galatia. And conversely, it would further validate the gospel Paul preached and increase his fruitfulness in mission.
- I love Paul's concern about "running in vain." The image conveys two important realities for Paul: 1) He was working hard. How did he go about ministry? This was no stroll. This was no walk in the park. He was running, sweating, breathing hard because the gospel was worthy of his very best effort. 2) He wanted to make sure his ministry counted. He was running toward the goal of Christ and Christlikeness in his people. We see this language surface several times in his letters and it usually refers to his concern for people to mature in Christ. He wanted his ministry to count and see real progress, real fruit.
 - **"Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in**

the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.” (Philippians 2:14-16)

- **“For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.” (1 Thess. 3:5)**

Trans: True fruitfulness comes only through the gospel. And so we see that unity must be built on the same gospel foundations. If we’re talking about two different gospels, we cannot have unity in matters of eternal significance. Not only is unity centered around gospel proclamation . . .

II. Unity is a motivator for gospel preservation (2:3-6).

- *Read 3-6.*
- Titus was a traveling companion of Paul who became a leader in the early church and has a book of the Bible named after him. We should note that Paul’s practice was to constantly have people with him who could learn under him, imitate his conduct, and communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what we want to establish at RHC, a culture where people younger in the faith are hanging out with, rubbing shoulders with, and being mentored by those more spiritually mature in the faith.
- Titus was not just a traveling companion, he was also a Greek. He was an uncircumcised Gentile and a product of the Gentile mission that was in dispute. He was a real life example of what the false teachers were challenging. Hey, people like Titus, if they really love God, if they really want to obey God and show that they are part of his people, they should be circumcised.
- But Paul says, this treasured practice among the Jews is not required for salvation, in fact it never was, as we will see as we move through Galatians. It was a symbol showing that they belong to God’s people.
- Some were saying circumcision is still necessary to be in with God and his people.
- Paul calls them “false brothers” and describes their actions with very specific terms. They were “secretive” and snuck into the church. They “slipped in” so that they might “spy out” the freedom Jesus brings.
- They did not slip in because they wanted to experience the same freedom, but as Paul says in v. 4 “so that they might bring us into slavery.”
- Paul talks a lot about slavery and freedom in this letter. At various points he will explain that the gospel gives freedom and every Christian enjoys that freedom. Freedom is a beautiful result of our salvation.
- Freedom refers to freedom from the law. This is huge... Free from having to keep the demands of the law as the requirement for salvation. The false teachers, were saying that in order to obtain salvation, you must be circumcised and keep the expectations of the law.
- If freedom were found through keeping the law, then Titus would have most certainly needed to be circumcised, but what is Paul’s response... Absolutely not!
- Verse 5: “to them we did not yield in submission *even for a moment*, so that the gospel might be preserved for you.” To say circumcision is required for salvation would be to deny the gospel.
- Remember, Paul worked so hard because he loves the gospel and he loves the Galatians, and his aim in all of this is “that the truth of the gospel be preserved for *them*.”
- He did everything in his power to ensure that the Galatians are not receiving burdens on their back from false teachers. He so desperately wants them to know the freedom of salvation, that he will do whatever it takes to ensure they can continue to walk in that freedom.
- **Legalism is acceptance through performance.**
- Legalism says, “Do this and this and this and then you will be accepted, then you will be free.”

- The ironic tragedy is that those extra rules prove to be nothing but burdens.
- Think about this: What happens if we have to wonder if we have done enough to appease God? We operate out of fear, guilt, and resentment. Rather than loving and enjoying God for who he is and what he's done, we work tirelessly so that we will measure up.
- This is how many people view God in our city. God is a detached deity with unrealistic expectations. If we have to do enough good things in order to really be good and finally be accepted by God, then we really have to continue to find ways to "pay God off."
- If I do this, God is happy. If I do this, God is even more happy with me. If I slip up, I'm in trouble.
- Our relationship, our salvation is not based on our behavior but the work of Christ. This frees us from guilt and insecurity before God.
- {P} This is Paul's concern. He does what he does so that his brothers & sisters in Galatia, many of whom he led to Christ, are not weighed down by crushing burdens that say, "if you don't do this, you don't measure up in God's eyes." That is why I'm saying "**Unity is a motivator for gospel preservation.**" (Pt 2. Slide again)
- I can say that because if they suffer, Paul suffers. If they are weighed down with burdens, Paul is going to feel that. (cf. Gal 4:19)
- Paul's convictions were endorsed by the pillars in the Jerusalem church (Peter, James & John).
- This is what he says in verse six. "Those who seemed influential added nothing to me." They added nothing to his gospel. And don't miss Paul's statement "what they were makes no difference to me, God shows no partiality." EXPOUND...
- Here's a good word for us on leadership: We all have people we admire and respect. Leaders should be recognized and respected for the service, but we should also recognize their fallibility. We should never venerate a leader as if they are the goal. Jesus gives leaders to his church so that they might be instruments to point people to him!
- Don't idolize spiritual leaders, pastors, preachers, writers, thinkers . . . Apollos, Cephas, Paul, Piper, Keller, Chandler, no, no, no. JESUS

Trans: #3.

III. Unity is expressed in gospel fellowship (2:7-9).

- Paul finishes his reflection on his time in Jerusalem by letting the Galatians know that there was full agreement between himself, Barnabus, and Titus, and Peter, James, and John.
- They were partners in the gospel. There is no partnership in life that has depths to equal gospel partnership.
- He says in v. 9 that they gave them the "right hand of fellowship." This was more than a gesture. It was a symbol of their shared commitment to God and his truth, and one another.
- Now, on what grounds did they have fellowship? Paul mentions two primary reasons specified in vv. 7-9 by the word "when." "When this happened and when this happened," fellowship was expressed.
- This is how they could have fellowship together, and let me go ahead and tell you this is the same reason deep, God-given fellowship is established today. Don't miss this: Whatever degree, whatever depth you experience these with another person, will be the primary barometer for the depth of your friendship. It doesn't matter if we're talking about a friend, co-worker, spouse, child, parent, neighbor, apply this to any relationship.
- What are they? #1

They shared a common faith in the gospel (7).

- Look back at verse 7: “On the contrary, *when they saw*” saw what? “*that I had been entrusted with the gospel.*” There was consistency in their understanding of the gospel, and this likemindedness around the gospel gave them true unity.
- God was at work in both Peter and Paul because the same Jesus revealed the gospel to them and gave them the same assignment, to preach that gospel, just to two different peoples as v. 8 says, “for he who worked... worked also..”
- If you don’t have the gospel in common, you will not experience all that God has for you in that relationship, which is one reason why Paul is going to say, “Don’t be unequally yoked to unbelievers.” That is a wise command for dating relationships and certainly marriages, but also to our everyday friendships. It does not mean that I don’t have a lot of non-Christian friends. Jesus was “*a friend of sinners.*” BUT it does mean that we should gather regularly and intentionally with those whom we share the gospel.

Trans: Their *gospel message* was the same. #2

They shared a common grace to live out the gospel (9).

- They recognized grace in Paul. *Verse 9. “and when perceived the grace”*
- So this was not just the same message, it was also the fact that this message *really made a difference* in Paul’s life. God’s grace was all over him. When God’s grace is at work in someone, you can see it, and here’s the deal about the grace of God. It’s magnetic.
- When get around people who have grace stamped on their life, just flowing out of their life, you will want to spend more time with them. Let’s be grace-filled people!
- Gospel Message. Check. Gospel Grace manifested in life. Check.

They shared a common mission to spread the gospel (9).

- Their partnership, fellowship, was centered around the gospel and mission.... “that we should *go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”
- That’s why I don’t have to spend hours with the Coppengers who serve in SE Asia to know that I love them.
- Let’s never make the mistake of pitting community against mission and mission against the community. We’re a community on a mission together with the gospel. We’re a gospel community on mission. Our gospel mission is lived in community. Our gospel compels us to be about mission in community. You got it?

Trans: And this is brought home further in *verse 10*.

IV. Unity is enhanced through gospel implications (2:10).

- What we learn in these final verses is that the gospel that brings people together and makes them family in Christ, is what keeps them thriving as they move forward.
- The gospel builds a new community of people. It is the foundation. BUT, the gospel also continues to build the new community in every conceivable way, so that it is also the sticks and stones, bricks and mortar of God’s constructive design.
- So what is happening in verse 10 is this: Peter says, “Hey Paul, we’re all set on the gospel, same page, fellowship right there, but bro, don’t forget about the poor.” And Paul says, “Peter, you already know!” . . . Something like that . . .
- Paul is saying, “Oh, you want to be about that? No problem. The gospel also compels us to be about that. Matter of fact... I am eager to do that. I am excited. Just say the word!”
- God has always had regard for the poor. God is a God who sees us in our helplessness and need, and he cares.
- 2 Cor. 8:9 tells us both of a God who has regard for the poor and provides the motivation for our own generosity to those in need.

- **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)**
- If you’re Christianity does not lead you to generosity to the poor, then you may be missing the real thing.
- The implications of the gospel brought Peter & Paul into beautiful alignment. And we could just chase this reality for days!!!

Expound on Various Gospel Implications

- Why are we about missions & evangelism? The gospel compels us. (2 Cor. 5:14)
- Why are we committed to give ourselves away in serving in and out of the church? I mean who is really waking up early to serve? People gripped by the gospel. (John 13)
- Why are we pursuing strong marriages? The gospel. (Eph 5)
- Why do we believe our work matters and pursue a godly work ethic & work ethics? The gospel. (John 18:30) Integrity, Commitment, Joy because I’m serving God and my neighbor through my work and it’s all to his glory.
- Why pray? The gospel.

You want to know why Jon is one of my best friends? It’s not just because we work together.... It’s because the gospel is driving both of us to the same commitments. You want deeper friendships? Go deeper with the gospel!

- Let me say something loud and clear. We will have disagreement from time to time in this church. The leadership may make some decisions that you are not thrilled about, BUT the gospel and the mission it calls us to, and the love that has already been built should be enough, more than enough, to keep us united, moving forward together for the glory of God among us.
- Let’s not ever let Satan drive a wedge in our unity over small matters, but let’s unite around our love for him, our love for one another and the mission he has given us.

Conclusion:

What brings people together? The gospel.... Jesus died to create a people. Have you experienced his grace in the gospel? Do you know his salvation?

Connect Card: I want to know more...

Are you experiencing the deep fellowship that flows from the gospel? I would posit the only thing holding you back is you. Let God free you to experience gospel unity today. Let’s pray.

Connect Card: What step do you need to take? CG? Membership?