The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 2 April 2017. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Gospel: The Great Unifier

Galatians 2:11-14

In the past month, we have been studying Galatians 1 and 2. Now, as you know (if you have been here in the last several weeks), Paul had to spend much time in this letter defending his Apostleship. Paul shouldn’t have had to prove his Apostleship, because he was the one who had led many of the Galatians to the Lord. Yet, because they had listened to false teachers, these believers were now confused about their own salvation; and they were beginning to look at Paul with suspicion. Paul had to write to the Galatians to defend his Apostleship and the Gospel, because the false teachers were attacking both.

So, as part of his defence of his Apostleship, Paul recounted his testimony of how God had called him to be an Apostle. He reminded them of how, before he was saved, he had been a fierce persecutor of Christians. But then, Christ appeared to him while he was on his way to Damascus, and revealed Himself as the risen Jesus. Christ revealed to Paul that he had chosen him as His vessel to bear the Gospel to the Gentiles. From the very moment of his salvation, Paul knew that Christ had chosen him to be an Apostle. For three years, he lived in Arabia; and during that time, the Lord Himself appeared to Paul, and personally trained him to be His Apostle. After the three years were up, Paul went up to Jerusalem, and met the Apostles Peter and James for the first time. Then, he teamed up with Barnabas, and began to preach the Gospel and establish churches all over Cilicia, Pamphylia, and Lycaonia (in southern Turkey).

But then, about 14 years later, Paul found out that there were false teachers from the church of Jerusalem who were going into the churches that he had established, and were teaching that salvation is by faith in Christ plus keeping the Law. Paul and Barnabas lost no time: they went immediately to Jerusalem to talk with Peter, James, and John (who were the pastors of the Jerusalem church), and to report to them what these unauthorised men from their church were teaching. A church business meeting was held; and the false teachers, along with their false gospel of works, were denounced.

However, there was another reason why Paul went to Jerusalem. Not only did he go there to defend the Gospel: he also went there to tell Peter, James, and John his testimony of how Christ had called him to be an Apostle. (Up to this point, few people knew about his calling to be an Apostle.) Now, Paul did not need Peter, James, and John’s approval in order to be a “real” Apostle, because God had already made Paul an Apostle. However, Paul did wish for someone else to announce his Apostleship. As it turned out, Peter, James, and John had no doubts that Paul was a true Apostle. The Holy Spirit revealed to them that Paul was telling the truth. Peter, James, and John gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, and acknowledged them as Apostles to the Gentiles, and themselves as Apostles to the Jews.

The Apostles were great men of God, with unique authority. Yet, they were still sinners; and as sinners, they stumbled at times. Today, we will see how even Peter and Barnabas once failed to walk uprightly according to the Gospel. The title of this message is The Gospel: The Great Unifier.

Galatians 2:11-14

I. The Law: segregator of Jew and Gentile
In Galatians 2:9-10, Paul told the Galatian Christians about the meeting that he had had with Peter, James, John, Paul, and Barnabas all left the meeting in close fellowship. They all recognised that Paul and Barnabas were Apostles to the Gentiles, and that Peter, James, and John were Apostles to the Jews. But then, sometime later, they had a very awkward meeting. On this occasion, Paul was not at Peter’s church (in Jerusalem); instead, Peter, and some of the other men from his church, were visiting Paul’s home church in Antioch. Shortly after Peter arrived at the church of Antioch, they did what all good Baptists do: they had a church fellowship dinner! Peter was eating with the Gentile brethren of the church of Antioch; and everyone was having sweet fellowship.

But then, the trouble started. Some of the members of Peter’s church (who had been travelling in another company) showed up a little late for the dinner. Now, the Scripture doesn’t tell us many specifics about why Peter suddenly felt pressured to separate himself from the Gentiles; but there must have been some Jewish brethren in this group from Peter’s church who still had some strong ideas about clinging to Old Testament Jewish culture. Now, these men surely did not believe that keeping the Law is necessary for salvation. If this had been the case, Peter, as their pastor, would not have tolerated it. Yet, they must have personally felt a strong inclination to follow many of the Jewish rituals of the Old Testament, even though they were no longer bound to do so. At any rate, Peter suddenly felt peer pressure from these other Jewish brethren. He got up from the table, separated himself from his Gentile brothers, went over to the section where the Jews were, and began to eat with them. The peer pressure was so strong, that even Barnabas went along with it. Now, this was truly amazing. Why? Because Barnabas was an Apostle to the Gentiles! For at least a decade and a half, Barnabas and Paul had been planting churches among the Gentiles, and leading them to Christ! Barnabas had eaten with Gentiles many times, and had no reserve about it. Yet, in a moment of peer pressure, he snubbed his Gentile brothers, and separated himself from them.

Why did Peter act so rudely toward his Gentile brothers? Well, to understand this, there is something you must understand about the Old Testament Law: the Old Testament Law demanded that the Jews separate themselves from the Gentiles! God’s mandate to the Jews in Old Testament times was not the mandate that God has given to the church in the New Testament age. God did not command the Jews to go into all the world and tell people about the true God. Instead, He commanded Israel to separate themselves from the Gentiles, and to be holy unto the Lord. God’s design was that the Gentiles around them would see their holy lives, and desire to know about the true God, and thus go to the land of Israel to find out how they could put their faith in the God of Israel.

1 Kings 8:41-43

Israel was to be separate. Time and time again, God commanded the Jews, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them (the Gentiles); thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his (a Gentile’s) son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). God was so serious about the Jews’ being separated from other nations around them, that He even commanded them not to eat many kinds of meat. Let’s take a look at Israel’s diet.

Deuteronomy 14:3-21
Why did God command the Jews not to eat all these different kinds of meat? Was it for health reasons? That may have been part of the reason. We now know that some of these meats (especially swine meat) are not the healthiest kinds of meat to eat. It also makes total sense not to eat anything that “dieth of itself” (an animal that is already dead, or dying). Obviously, such an animal is probably diseased, and is a health risk to eat. Yet, health could not have been the only reason for God’s dietary laws. After all, God had changed His requirements concerning the eating of meat several times already. Before the Flood, God did not give man permission to eat meat: it was only herbs that man was allowed to eat (Genesis 1:29). But then, after the Flood, God gave man permission to eat all animal meat (with the one stipulation that they were not to eat blood) (Genesis 9:3-4). Because of the radical change in the environment after the Flood, it was now necessary for man to add meat to his diet.

But then, God’s law changed again. About 1,000 years after the Flood, God commanded His people, the Jews, not to eat many kinds of animals. Why the sudden change, when previously they had been allowed to eat any kind of meat? And why did God require this specifically of the Jews, and not of the Gentiles? The reason is simple: God intended Israel’s dietary prohibitions to be a living illustration to them of the difference between that which is sinful and that which is pure. Every time the Jews saw an unclean animal, they were reminded of the fact that God is holy, and that He therefore demands that His people separate themselves from that which is unholy, and from people who practice evil. God’s command to “touch not the unclean thing” was to be engrained into their minds and hearts.

By the way, this “touch not the unclean thing” principle should be engrained in our hearts, as well. Israel’s diet still illustrates this truth to us. Drinking a can of Guinness, or a bottle of Madeira, should be as abominable to us as eating a dog was to the Jews. Going into a pub, and sitting down with people who are drinking, smoking, and cursing, should be as loathsome to us as eating a swine was to the Jews. Watching a Hollywood movie should be as unclean to us as eating a rat was to the Jews. Listening to the world’s rock or pop music should be as detestable to us as eating a vulture was to the Jews. We should not have any part or connection with the unfruitful works of darkness.

God separated the Jews from the nations around them because He didn’t want them to be corrupted by the satanic influences of their wicked, idolatrous religions. But, at the same time, God was constantly reminding the Jewish people that He had not chosen them to be His people because they were worthier than, or morally superior to, the Gentiles. He reminded them that they were undeserving rebels. In Deuteronomy 9:6 God told Israel, “Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people.” God made it clear to Israel that He had chosen to use them in a special way for one simple reason: they were the descendants of Abraham. Because Abraham trusted and obeyed the Lord, God chose him to be the man through whom the Messiah would one day come, and bring the blessing of salvation to the whole world. God told Abraham, “In thy seed (in one particular descendant of his), shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Because Israel was the nation through whom the Messiah would one day come, God reminded Israel that they had a responsibility. They were to be a testimony of the true God, so that the nations of the world would be prepared to receive the Messiah—the one who would be the Light to the Gentiles.
Now, many Gentiles in the Old Testament did put their faith in Israel’s God, and were saved; and many of them even joined themselves the commonwealth of Israel. Yet, even then, believing Gentiles were never fully incorporated into the nation of Israel. There was still a “wall” of separation between Jew and Gentile. But all that was about to change!

II. The Gospel: unifier of Jew and Gentile

When Christ began His earthly ministry, the Gospel age began. When Jesus began to preach, He told the people, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” The Gospel that Jesus proclaimed during His earthly ministry is the same Gospel that we must believe in today. The Gospel was, and is, the “good news” that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again in order to provide salvation for us. Now, Christ had not yet died on the cross and risen again; but from the beginning of His ministry, He proclaimed that very soon, He would do just that. The Old Testament era was officially over, and the New Testament age had begun. Jesus said, “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” In other words, John the Baptist’s preaching and baptising marked the end of the Old Testament era. The church age—the “Gospel” age—had now dawned. Every time someone was baptised by John the Baptist, or by Jesus’ 12 Apostles, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was being pictured in symbol. (Quote Romans 6:4.)

Yet, not all the vestiges of the Old Testament age were gone. Yes, there were some Gentiles who believed on Christ during His earthly ministry, and were saved; but they were not yet incorporated into Christ’s new institution, the church. They were not yet being baptised into the body of Christ. Only Jewish believers in Jesus were being baptised at that point. Now, Jesus made it clear that very soon, the Gentile believers would be brought into His church. He said, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold (in other words, the Gentiles); them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16). The Gentiles’ time was near; but it hadn’t come yet. For the time being, Jewish believers were still separated from Gentile believers in many ways. The Jewish believers were still following the kosher diet, which was the very symbol of the separation between Jew and Gentile. But then, in one day, the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile came crashing down. In A.D. 41, God broke down the wall between Jewish and Gentile believers. And the Apostle Peter was the one to whom God gave this announcement!

Acts 10:9 – 11:18

For 1,400 years, the dietary laws that God gave to Israel had been a living illustration to the Jews of the fact that they were to separate themselves from evil, and to separate from the Gentiles, so that they would not learn their idolatrous ways. But then, God did not need the illustration any longer. In a moment of time, He did away with the restrictions on meat in order to show the Jewish believers that God had now accepted believing Gentiles as members of His churches. Not only were the Gentile believers not required to abstain from certain meats, but even Jewish believers were no longer required to abstain from certain meats. Peter understood the implications of this immediately. When God said, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common,” Peter knew what this meant: he could now sit down and have supper with Gentiles! And that’s exactly what he did. After Cornelius’s household believed on Jesus Christ, Peter immediately baptised them; and a new church, composed completely of Gentiles, was formed, right there in the city of Caesarea. Then, Peter sat down with these
Gentile church members, and had a church fellowship meal with them. There was no longer any wall of separation between them. The Gospel had broken down that wall.

**Ephesians 2:11-18**

For 1,400 years, there had been a wall between Jew and Gentile. Even Gentiles who believed on the true God, and joined themselves to the commonwealth of Israel, still did not have many of the privileges that the Jews did—such as worshipping within the inner wall of the Temple, along with the Jews. They had to worship outside the wall. In 1871 and 1934, pieces of the old Temple wall were discovered; and on these pieces of wall, they found this writing, in Latin and Greek: “Let no Gentile, let no man of the nations, go beyond this wall on pain of death.” This is probably the literal wall that Paul was thinking about as he wrote about this “wall” between Jews and the Gentiles. The Law was the “wall” between Jew and Gentile! However, the Law was much more than a horizontal “wall” between Jew and Gentile: it was also a vertical “wall” between man and God. It is impossible for us to get over that wall on our own, because we all have fallen short of keeping the Law. God had to break down the wall Himself, so that we could be reconciled to Him. He broke down that wall by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to shed His blood on the cross for us. Christ took God’s wrath upon sin, in our place. He paid our sin debt in full. He bore sin’s curse for us. By shedding His blood for us, Christ cancelled the effect of the Law, which is condemnation. No barrier stands between you and God. If God had demanded that you get over the wall of the Law by your own effort, you would have no hope. You couldn’t do it! But, thank God, there is no more wall. The way is wide open, and God is calling out to sinners, “My Son has shed His blood for you, and broken down the wall. Come near!” All one has to do is take God at His word, and come. The only thing keeping people from coming to God is their own pride and self-righteousness.

God offers *peace* to every man who will take His offer. This "peace" is not a mere “feeling of calm.” Yes, there is a wonderful calm in your spirit, which comes with being a child of God. But feelings fluctuate. Great trials arise in the lives of the godliest Christians—circumstances which bring perplexity, darkness, uncertainty, and pain. If feelings were the test by which you reckoned whether you were God’s child, you’d have no certainty from one day to the next if you were still saved. No, the “peace” Paul is talking about is the removal of the enmity between us and God! This is a *positional* peace. Because we who know Him have this positional peace, we can also have *inward* peace. This "peace" consists of an inward assurance that no matter what trial we may have to go through, we still belong to Jesus: and He is always with us. He is our Peace. The Law was the wall: but the wall has been removed!

But let’s return to the wall between Jew and Gentile. (Read verses 14-16 again.) Paul says that the Law had separated not only men from God, but also Jews from Gentiles. But now, that separation is abolished. He uses the analogy of a human body to describe this union of Jew and Gentile believers together. He calls this union of Jew and Gentile “one new man.” But what is this “one new man,” exactly? It is the New Testament assembly--the local church. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul told the church of Corinth, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Remember, as Paul was writing Ephesians 2:15-16, he was writing to a particular church--the church of Ephesus. This church, like most other churches in those days, had been started by Jewish believers, and still had a strong core of Jews; but there were also many Gentiles in this
church. These Jews and Gentiles had previously been "twain" ("two"); but from the day when God gave that vision to Peter, Jew and Gentile were considered to be "one new man."

Now, in the Old Testament, there was always “the family of God.” There was never any division between Jew and Gentile in “the Family of God,” because it is made up of all believers, regardless of what tribe of earth they come from. But when it came to the place of worship, there was a literal wall that barred the Gentiles from worshipping with the Jews. Gentiles were not permitted in the Temple courtyard. They had to pray outside the wall.

It is in the place of worship that the wall between Jew and Gentile has been broken down. The place of worship today is no longer the Temple in Jerusalem, but the spiritual Temple of the local, New Testament church. In the local church, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (or between any other ethnicities or human parties). (Quote Galatians 3:28.) In the local, New Testament church, Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, come together into one physical location, put aside cultural differences, and fellowship together upon the common foundation of God's Word, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Fear of man: destroyer of Christian unity, and of the Gospel (vv. 11-14)

(Read verses 11-14 again.) Before the Apostles received the Gospel message, there were prejudices that were deeply engrained in them, as Jews. Particularly, they had been taught to hate the Gentiles. Of course, God had not taught them to hate the Gentiles. He commanded them to be separate from them, so that they would not adopt their wicked ways; but they were to love the stranger, and to be a light to them, so that they would believe on the true God.

Sadly, the Jews got the message all wrong. Most Jews hated the Gentiles. Even Jewish believers in Jesus Christ struggled, for a while, with their old prejudices against the Gentiles. But the Gospel changed all that. When Peter told the other Jewish Christians about the revelation that God had given him, and about how a whole Gentile household had been saved and baptised, the unthinkable happened. They rejoiced! Centuries of ingrained prejudice began to melt away; and they rejoiced to call the Gentiles their brothers. That is what the Gospel does to people! In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

Now, there certainly was nothing wrong with the Jewish believers’ continuing to be circumcised, or in their continuing to celebrate the Old Testament feasts. To this day, many Jewish believers still celebrate the Jewish feasts (at least, as much of it as they can celebrate without a Temple or sacrificial system.) It is not wrong for Jewish believers to keep these traditions alive, because all these things point to Christ. It isn’t even wrong for Jewish believers to eat a kosher diet, if they so wish. But what is wrong is to give even the slightest impression that keeping the Law has any part in salvation. The moment you add Law-keeping to the Gospel, it is no longer the true Gospel. I say this because there is a growing “Hebrew Roots” movement (led by false teachers such as Mark Biltz and John Hagee), which literally teaches that Gentiles must keep the Old Testament Sabbath and feasts. They don’t directly teach that Law-keeping is part of salvation; but they may just as well say it. (They go so far as to say that Jews do not need to be converted to Christianity. They deny the Lord Himself!) Also, it is wrong to say that the Old Testament feasts, Sabbaths, and other rituals that God gave to the Jews, are required of us today. Here is what Paul had to say about these issues.

Colossians 2:12-17
The holy days, Sabbaths, kosher diet, and circumcision have all been done away with. Not even Jewish believers are required to do them. We may do them; but we don’t have to do them. For Gentile believers to tell Jewish believers that “You can’t celebrate the Passover” is wrong; and likewise, it is wrong for Jews to tell Gentiles, “I can’t eat with you, because you are from another nation.” That is where Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish brethren stepped over the line. Paul didn’t hesitate to rebuke them for it, either. Paul told Peter to his face that he was wrong. (By the way, if Peter were the “first pope,” as the Catholic Church teaches, then Paul was the one who was out of line for rebuking the “holy father”! Obviously, Peter was no one’s “holy father”!) Let’s read that passage again. (Read Galatians 2:11-14 again.)

You see, the Gospel frees us not only from the penalty of the Law, but also from the power of sin. You don’t have to be controlled by the old sinful prejudices that you had before you were saved, Christian. You have no right to say, “Well, that’s just the way I am. These are the feelings I’ve had since I was a kid, and I’m not going to change.” Christ has freed you from the curse of the Law; but He has freed you so that you can now live unto righteousness! In Christ, you have the power to love others, just as Christ loves them.

Now, make no mistake about it: Peter was not consciously or purposely undermining the Gospel. He certainly had not stopped believing that salvation is by the grace of God alone. He certainly had not begun to preach that salvation is by faith plus keeping the Law. Yet, Paul said that Peter was “walking not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel.” By separating himself from the Gentiles, Peter was undermining the Gospel itself!

How was Peter undermining the Gospel? He was undermining the Gospel by sending the message that Jew and Gentile were still separated by the wall of the Law. The Gospel had torn down that old wall; so by building that wall back up again, it was as though Peter were saying that Christ hadn’t died and risen again to provide salvation for the Jew and the Gentile. By denying one of the effects of the Gospel (the fact that God had now unified believing Jews and Gentiles), it was as though Peter were denying the Gospel itself! It was as though he were saying that salvation is by keeping the Law, and not by God’s grace. Peter didn’t believe this, or teach this; but his action of separating himself from the Gentiles seemed to say otherwise.

There is much that we can learn from this, brethren. The Bible says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteh his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25). If you be afraid of what others say or think, you will end up sinning against the Lord, and being a bad example to others. Ecclesiastes 10:1 says, “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.” Peter was a man with a reputation for wisdom and honour; but when
fear of man took over, he set a very bad example, which others followed. Worst of all, his example indirectly cast questions upon the Gospel itself! Christian, do not fear man!

**Conclusion:** The Gospel is the great Unifier of Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, male, and female, who place their faith in the risen Jesus. Christian, are you, in any way, allowing the fear of man to control your actions, so that you are being a stumbling block to other believers, and a possible cause of disunity in Christ’s church? If so, surrender that fear to God, and allow Him to remove it from your life! I would also ask: Are you certain that you are on your way to heaven? If you can’t answer this question with confidence, then you probably are *not* on your way to heaven, because you fail to understand that the wall between you and God has been broken down. The *Law* was the wall. You cannot keep the Law; and that is why you are separated from God. But Christ broke down the wall by paying your sin debt. All you have to do is come to God through His Son, in simple faith. If you will repent and believe, He will save you!