

Put The Gospel First! – Pt 3
(Romans 16:17-27 February 19, 2012)



In eternity past – God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit set in motion a plan that would culminate in eternity with redeemed men and women from every tribe and tongue and nation united as one and worshipping Christ forever.

That plan was not clearly and fully revealed to the Jews. However, it was very clearly and fully laid out for the church.

There is not one Christian who can doubt that the church of Jesus Christ is **meant** to be made up of Africans and Chinese and Europeans and Pacific Islanders and Eskimos and Jews.

There is not one Christian who can doubt that the church of Jesus Christ is **meant** to be made up of old and young, rich and poor, slave and free, well educated and barely educated.

There is not one Christian who can doubt that the church of Jesus Christ is **meant** to be made up of men and women from every possible race and social strata.

There is a place for everyone in the Kingdom.

However, when we come to individual local churches – well that is another story.

While we agree that all people *should* be in the universal church – that does not mean they should be in *our* local church. Ethnic groups can have their own church. People with different musical tastes look elsewhere. Families that don't fit our ethos and social groupings should be in another church as they will rock our boat.

But even that isn't enough. Even in churches composed of very similar social and ethnic groups – divisions are rife. Why?

Sin in the form of pride, power and prejudice.

I am right don't disagree with me.

I am boss don't mess with me.

The result? The one group that is meant to declare to the world – the power of Jesus to wash our sin and unite us as one – is often fractured – and leaves a bad taste in the watching world.

You are meant to come to a church on Sunday – and there are your brothers and sisters – those you are united to by the blood of Christ – you sing together of Christ – you hear from His Word – you fellowship at His table – you are given a vision of His plan.

An unbeliever is meant to walk in and say wow – the gospel is real – nothing else could unite this lot together.

But, if they walk into a war over some preference, some power play, some disagreement. If they feel excluded. Then the gospel of Jesus Christ is tarnished.

This is what was happening in Rome.

The church in Rome had been founded by some Jewish Christians – and while some Gentiles came to faith – it was a majority ethnically Jewish.

But, in 49 AD – things changed. The Roman Emperor Claudius gave an edict, requiring all ethnic Jews to leave Rome – this included Jews who had become Christians.

So suddenly the church which had been founded and dominated by Jewish Christians – was suddenly entirely Gentile.

The Gentile believers ran the church for five years or so. But then Jews were allowed back into Rome.

When they got back, things had changed. Leaders had changed who had put their own stamp on the way things were done.

The Gentiles were the majority and the church had a distinctly Gentile feel.

The Jews were not happy with the changes. There was not enough keeping of the Law for their liking – especially in areas like food laws and feasts and Sabbaths.

Basically, the Gentiles were worshipping Christ – without the Jewish flavour that those from a Jewish background thought was necessary.

There was a clash of cultures – a battle of the wills. The church was divided. And when word reached Paul – he knew the ramifications.

There was a strong potential that the church in Rome – possibly the most strategic church in the empire – might split – into a Jewish church and a Gentile church.

When you read how Paul addresses the Roman Christians – in general they are committed and sold out. They are impacting this strategic city.

But now their effectiveness is about to be derailed.

A divided church is not an evangelising church.

And a divided church is not a church that attracts anyone.

And so Romans was written – a manifesto on the fact that the true gospel unites all groups – and a manifesto on the importance of making the preaching of the gospel a priority.

Paul makes it clear – everyone – Jew and Gentile are sinners – lost without hope. Not Jewish roots, or Law can save – only Christ.

Then in chapter 14 Paul moves from addressing their common salvation – to appealing to the Jews and Gentiles for unity in the church – so that the gospel can go forth. Paul cries:

Don't pass judgment on your brother.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God.

Now at the very end of Romans Paul makes a plea.



Unite for the gospel

Here is God's plan.

The Church of Jesus Christ is to be a visible picture to the world of the gospel. You take these disparate groups and people – every tribe and tongue and nation – you unite them to Christ – and thus to each other.

You give them a love for Christ – that issues in a love for each other.

And the world looks on in amazement.

John 13:35:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

The history of the world is a history of wars. Nation against nation, tribe against tribe, family against family.

Montagues and Capulets – are the norm.

Put different races, ethnicities, ages, preferences together in the world – and you don't have to wait long for the infighting, backstabbing and attacks.

But – if these same groups actually love each other – this sacrificial, forgiving love is so foreign, so unnatural – that when an unbeliever sees it – they know it can only come from above.

They know that those who have this *imprint* of the love of God – those who bear the mark of Christ in their love – they **must** be disciples of Christ. And the power to form the church – must come from above.

And this is a powerful testimony to the world.

Listen to Acts 2:41-47:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and *having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

This Christ-like love was so evident in the life of the church that they had favour with the people and many people came to salvation day by day.

A famous and wealthy athlete turns to Christ and is welcomed into fellowship by the *Grace Bible Church*. Nothing amazing there.

A male prostitute from Zaire, broke and dying of AIDS turns to Christ and is welcomed into fellowship by *Grace Bible Church*. He is taken into the home of a member. Has his medical needs paid for by the church and is welcomed openly and wholeheartedly into the lives of the saints. *That* is unnatural. *That* doesn't come from the world.

People will ask where does such love come from? And we are to reply – it comes from Christ – who loved us. May we tell you of His love for you?

This world is beset by dog eat dog and driven by me-first attitudes. Men want sex and wealth. We expect them to cheat on or leave their wives. We expect them to give only what costs them little. Children can barely stand their parents. The aged are a burden. The poor are a nuisance. Foreigners are unwelcome.

But in the midst of the sea of dog eat dog me first attitudes – what if they see a glaring exception? Somewhere where wives are cherished and not cheated on. Money is not worshipped. Parents and age are respected. The poor are helped. All men are seen as equal.

That is *unnatural*. People ask where does such love come from? And they reply – it comes from Christ – who loved us. May we tell you of His love for you?

As Christianity began to dominate in the Roman Empire, the pagan Emperor Julian who ruled from A.D. 324-363, tried in vain to halt the spread of the gospel of Christ. He wrote of the main source of his frustration:

Atheism [the way he viewed Christianity] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help we should render to them.¹

This pagan emperor looked helplessly as the gospel spread throughout his empire – and he said it was this unnatural love – a love that his pagan gods could not provide that fuelled the spread of Christianity.

That is how it is supposed to work.

But the church has a long ignoble history of continually messing up that plan – and God is not happy with that.

It cost Him the life of His Son to form the church. And when we are saved we become adopted sons of God.

So to mess with the plan of God and the people of God is to bring the wrath of God.

Just listen to 1 Corinthians 3:3–17:

You are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? ... Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

If you are divisive and mess up the church of God – God will destroy you. Don’t miss this. If you are divisive in the church – I follow Paul, I follow Apollos – God sets His face against you to destroy you.

That is how seriously the Lord treats division in the church.

Paul knows this. So as he concludes Romans – he leaves them with one final thought.

¹ Cited in John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (Crossway Books: Wheaton, 2003) p. 87.



God wants a diverse, yet united church

He then gives them three exhortations.

First:



***Remove the factious* – Romans 16:17–20**

Look at verse 17:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

Paul understands that divisions are usually the result of a few factious men or women.

When you read Romans the impression you get is that when the church was founded – the Jews and Gentiles got on fine. It also seems that when the Gentiles returned things were alright for a time.

But someone or several people have been stirring the pot.

This is almost universally the way.

A church is doing fine until someone turns up with a bee in their bonnet.

It might be eschatology – the church is not teaching regularly on the pretrib rapture.

It might be schooling – if the church took Proverbs 22:6 seriously they would say that homeshooling is the only proper way to raise a child.

It might be music – those old hymns are inhibiting the potential of this church and frightening off potential converts.

I just wish someone came here sniffing out those who want more evangelism or more missionaries – but they don't. It is their pet hobby-horse that gets them going – the teaching or practice that to them is the equivalent of the gospel. If you don't get this right – you can't be a strong church.

They arrive – and they sniff out those who hold similar thoughts. Those people had been OK with the way things were – but now they find themselves nodding and thinking – yes we need to change. The leaders need to know this. Those people who disagree with me – they need to change or leave.

And then they sniff out the elders and deacons. Anyone a bit sympathetic among the leaders?

And then when they have some support – they emerge from the shadows. The church has to hear our views. Our way is crucial for the health of the church.

Choose – are you with us or against us?

And people who used to think – I have preferences on this – but it is not that important – the gospel and unity is more important – are dragged in and told to choose.

And it never ends well.

Paul is absolutely consistent on how the church is to handle such people.

Titus 3:9–11:

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with

him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

In both 1 and 2 Timothy Paul addresses the issue of those who come into the church seeking the weak willed and vulnerable – stirring up dissension and strife. He says avoid them – reject them – remove them.

Listen to Paul's words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28–31:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert.

In Ephesians 4 – Paul makes it very clear that one of the responsibilities of elders is to preserve unity in the church by making sure that the church is not tossed about by every doctrine and teaching – by the wolves who come in sheep's clothing to destroy the church.

These unity breakers are a cancer. That is why Paul says:

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

What does this mean for our church?

If Dave or I teach heresy – kick us out.

If you don't like a doctrine, policy, decision the elders make – our door is always open.

However, if someone comes to you sniffing you out – I hear you are a fellow – no music older than three years man. We don't have anyone sympathetic on the elder board. The church will never grow. Are you with me?

Ask them – have you spoken to the elders?

“No – those elders won't listen – it is up to us.”

Then beware. This might be a factious man or woman.

Verse 18:

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve.

They always say – this is for the church's good. This is what Jesus would want.

Let me be clear – if the doctrine is major – heresy – then the whole church should be rising up to tell us we are heretics. If it is meetings over coffee to drum up support for

a minor doctrine – every alarm bell should be ringing.

Despite what they say – they are **not** serving the Lord – but their own appetites.

They want power, they want prominence – it is all about them and their preferences.

If you are naïve – they will get you.

How do you avoid being naïve? You read the word. You know the real heart of Christ. You learn to discern a major doctrine – from something minor and distracting.

Verse 19:

For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

The Roman church wanted to obey Christ. Those being swayed by the factious were thinking that is what God wants. God wants us to keep the Sabbath this way – and eat these foods and follow those feasts.

But they were not being wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

You and I need to be discerning.

Know what is good for the kingdom and what is evil.

Be wise and do what is good – solid doctrine, evangelism, unity.

Be innocent of doing evil – disunity that destroys the church and the witness of the gospel.

Verse 20:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Here is what Paul is saying. These men and women who are factious – while they think – truly think they are serving the Lord – are in fact serving Satan.

Satan hates the church. In Revelation 12 he is pictured as a serpent absolutely consumed with hatred for the church because God loves it. He wants to destroy it.

Anyone who is destroying the church of Jesus Christ – willingly or unwillingly – is an agent of Satan.

In Genesis 3:15 – God promised the One – Jesus – who would crush Satan's head.

That began at the cross – it will end at the Great White Throne.

But it is happening now.

Jesus will build His church and the gates of Hades will not prevail.

Factionous men and women may have their day – but ultimately they will be shown up for who they are – divisive, factionous, agents of Satan.

The true church will rise up against them.

And ultimately – Jesus will crush them.

Verse 20:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

When we do this – when we resist the factionous – God’s grace is with us. When we preserve unity and remove the divisive – then we are serving the Lord Christ.

What does this mean for our church?

The elders are far from perfect. If we teach something wrong. If we make a poor decision. If you don’t like a policy. Please feel free to talk to us.

We will listen. But ultimately the task of deciding what is best for this church falls to us. If we decide not to adopt your input – we don’t do it lightly.

It will be in areas of preference and policy – not in major doctrines.

We would hope that you would have the grace to accept that we are doing our best and support us.

If you can’t – leave. Whatever you do – don’t think your preference is so important it is worth destroying the church of Jesus Christ.

If you seek to drum up division – be warned – we will give you a caution – and if you don’t heed that caution – we will remove you.

The unity of this body is too precious for you to fracture it.

Having said that – I do want to thank you. I know how diverse we are.

I know where some of you stand on end times, and schooling, and spiritual gifts, and music – and although you don’t agree with us in total – you find what unites us far stronger than what divides us. You are uniting for the gospel. Thank you and may your tribe increase.

There is a *second* exhortation Paul gives:



Recognise your diversity – Romans 16:21-23

Look at Romans 16:21–23:

Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.

Paul is in Corinth writing this letter and he sends greetings from some of those with him in Corinth to the church in Rome.

In verse 21 – Paul sends greetings from four **Jews** – Timothy, Lucius, Jason and Sosipater.

In verses 22 and 23 – He sends greetings from four **Gentiles** – Tertius, Gaius, Erastus and Quartus.

Most likely these are men known to the Roman church – either because they have visited there, or were associates of people there, or simply because they are well known.

But the point is this. Jews and Gentiles – ministering together – send a greeting to the Roman church.

The church in Rome is not the only church in the empire dealing with the whole Jew/Gentile difficulties.

The vast majority of first century churches had Jews and Gentiles in them. Most churches started with Jews and then over time became predominantly Gentile.

Paul's point is that the Romans need to recognise that they are part of a diverse universal church.

The church at Rome is part of the whole work of God – that includes Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slaves and free.

Sometimes it is so easy to get wrapped up in our church – the way we do it – and to forget that we are one part of the worldwide march of the kingdom.

I was talking to a friend of mine who is a missionary. He was raised in a church that taught that drinking alcohol is a sin. He was sent as a missionary to a small town in an Eastern European country. His first stop was in the capital city where he would spend six to twelve months learning the language.

One of the lecturers invited him to dinner. The meal comes out – and the lecturer poured him a glass of wine. He didn't know what to do. Drink when he had been taught it was sin. Say no and offend the lecturer.

The lecturer recognized his hesitation and told him – regardless of what you may have been taught – whether to drink alcohol or not is not a major doctrine. We are not heretics – and I don't view you as one. **But** if you are going to work here – you have to either follow Paul in becoming all things to all people – and deciding to join us in a glass of alcohol – or work out a way to tactfully say – your conscience doesn't let you drink – but you have no problem with others who drink.

If not you should go home now. The church you come from in the US does not have the corner on truth. We are all part of the kingdom.

My friend told me he had his first glass of wine there and then.

Different churches in this state and country do things differently.

Communion is taken in so many ways. Weekly to yearly. Real wine to grape juice. Unleavened bread to Coles. In church, in homes, with a meal, by itself. And that is in very similar denominations.

Try going to Africa or Asia or South America. Churches adopt some customs and ways of doing things.

And being the sinners we are – we tend to think our way is best.

Go to a church service in rural Kenya – the music, the preaching, the feel will be quite unlike anything we are used to.

Also, I guarantee that if we took a first century Roman Christian who is used to meeting in a house church – that is part of a larger church – their communal relationships, meals, finances – their worship, song, prayer, preaching – would be nothing like ours.

We would feel uncomfortable there – they would feel uncomfortable there.

But – if we are in Christ. If we have trusted that Jesus is God, His death the one way of salvation, eternity comes by faith in the free gift – then we are all part of the church of Jesus Christ.

And that is greater than anything that separates us.

It is easy to see differences in practices in another church. It is easy to criticise. It is easy to think we do it better.

Maybe – maybe not. But if they are in Christ we should celebrate our unity and our oneness in Christ.

Paul is making that point by sending greetings from Jews *and* Gentiles.

Over the years we have had people come to our church who at first glance don't seem to fit. Their church background, views, personality – just don't seem to be a fit.

I could name plenty who stayed – who have taught me so much – who have caused us to shift our thinking and practice – and I thank God they didn't just walk away.

The body of Christ is wide – thank God for that diversity. Celebrate it – and use it to reach the diverse world around us.

There is a *final* exhortation Paul gives:



God wants a diverse, yet united church

- Remove the factious**
- Recognise your diversity**
- Remember God's plan**

Remember God's plan – Romans 16:25-27

Look at verses 25-27:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the

preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Note what Paul says here. His gospel – all that he has outlined in Romans – all men – Jew and Gentile – being sinners – Jesus as the One way of salvation – a partial hardening of Israel while the Gentiles come in – this gospel was simultaneously a mystery yet was in the prophetic writings – the Old Testament.

If you asked any Jew the year before Jesus began his ministry – who are the people of God? – they would have said – Israel is the people of God?

If you said – can Gentiles join the people of God? – they would have said – only if they become Jews first.

Would any Jews see themselves as entirely sinful and separated from God? – Doubtful.

The church – the idea of Jews and Gentiles in one body as the people of God would have been totally foreign to a Jew. They would have told you that is **not** what the Old Testament teaches.

And yet – all the way through Romans Paul has quoted the Old Testament to prove that what he is saying was always part of the plan of God.

He quotes Psalm 14 to show that all men – Jew and Gentile – are entirely sinful and have turned from God (Rom 3:9-18).

He speaks of the coming of Jesus as being born witness to by the Law and the Prophets (Rom. 3:21)

He quotes Hosea (Rom 9:25-26), Deuteronomy (Rom 10:19) and Isaiah (Rom 10:20) – to show that Gentiles as part of the people of God was always the plan.

He could have quoted Genesis 12:3 – through Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed – a truth repeated throughout Genesis.

He could have quoted the many times in the Psalms where all the peoples and nations are commanded to be part of those worshipping the Lord.

He could have quoted the many other times in Isaiah where it is clear that many nations and peoples are to be a part of the true people of God.

The fact is that the plan of God – Jesus coming to save men and women from every tribe and tongue and nation – is only *explicitly* made clear in the New Testament – however – it is there throughout the Old Testament.

This gospel that was kept secret for long ages has now been disclosed and has been

made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.

This phrase to bring about the obedience of faith – is how Paul began Romans. Romans 1:5:

We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

The plan of God is being actioned. The gospel is going forth to the outermost parts of the world. Men and women of every nation are being made disciples. Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, slave and free – all united in one body.

This was always the plan of God. Now – after the cross – it is being actioned.

Ephesians 3:3–6:

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

And when the gospel leads to the salvation of different peoples – the praise goes to the only wise God. In Him be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

When the gospel leads to people from every tribe and tongue and nation being saved – then the glory goes to God.

John Piper wrote my favourite missions book – ***Let the Nations Be Glad!***

The last chapter is entitled – The Supremacy of God Among “All the Nations.”

Listen to a few excerpts from that chapter.

The question now is: why does God pursue the goal of displaying His glory by focusing the missionary task on all the peoples of the world? ...

Paul said that his apostleship was given “to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of [Christ’s] name among all the nations*” (Romans 1:5). Missions is for the glory of Christ! ... Accordingly, the consummation of missions is described in Revelation 5:9 as persons from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation worshiping the Lamb and declaring the infinite worth of His glory.

Diversity: Intended and Eternal

The diversity of the nations has its creation and consummation in the will of God. Its origin was neither accident nor evil. Its future is eternal: the diversity will never be replaced by uniformity. ...

How Diversity Magnifies God

1. First, there is a beauty and power of praise that comes from unity in diversity that is greater than that which comes from unity alone. ... The beauty and power of praise that will come to the Lord from the diversity of the nations are greater than the beauty and power that would come to Him if the chorus of the redeemed were culturally uniform. ...
2. Second, the fame and greatness and worth of an object of beauty increases in proportion to the diversity of those who recognize its beauty. If a work of art is regarded as great among a small and like-minded group of people, but not by anyone else, the art is probably not truly great. ... But if a work of art continues to win more and more admirers not only across cultures but also across decades and centuries, then its greatness is irresistibly manifested. ... There is something about God that is so universally praiseworthy and so profoundly beautiful and so comprehensively worthy and so deeply satisfying that God will find passionate admirers in every diverse people group in the world. ...
3. Third, the strength and wisdom and love of a leader is magnified in proportion to the diversity of people He can inspire to follow Him with joy. If you can only lead a small, uniform group of people, your leadership qualities are not as great as if you can win a following from a large group of very diverse people. ... The more diverse the people groups who forsake their gods to follow the true God, the more visible is God's superiority over all His competitors!
4. By focusing on all the people groups of the world, God undercuts ethnocentric pride and puts all peoples back upon His free grace rather than any distinctive of their own. ... He is preparing for Himself a people – from all the peoples – who will be able to worship Him with free and “white-hot” admiration!

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of God in all of history is to uphold and display His glory for the enjoyment of the redeemed from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ...

Therefore the church is bound to engage with the Lord of Glory in His cause. It is our unspeakable privilege to be caught up with Him in the greatest movements in history – the ingathering of the elect “from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations” until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and all Israel is saved, and the Son of Man descends with power and great glory as King of kings and Lord of lords and the earth is full of the knowledge of His glory as the waters cover the sea for ever and ever. Then the supremacy of Christ will be manifest to all and He will deliver the kingdom to God the Father and God will be all in all!²

² Cited in John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), pp. 213-219.

Brothers and sisters – if we are diverse yet united, if the gospel is our priority – we have as Piper put it – the unspeakable privilege of being caught up in the greatest movement of history – the ingathering of the elect “from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations.”

That is what I desperately want to be a part of. This means being a diverse church. It means putting unity ahead of preference. It means putting the gospel first.

But if we find ourselves dividing over the inconsequential – excluding the different – failing to declare God’s glory – then we are a stumbling block to the plan of God.

May we be those who wholeheartedly embrace our unity in Christ and declare it among the nations.