

A Series on Ephesians
“The Other Half of the Gospel” (Ephesians 3:1-13)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on Ephesians. One of the things that I love about preaching through a book is that it forces us to deal with stuff that I would not otherwise deal with because I don't know it. When I preach topically, I tend to stick to stuff that I already know and I do some research on top of that. But, it's great to be forced to look at a passage in more detail than I would probably otherwise look at. Today is one of those days.

I want us to start today by looking at our mission/vision statement. Focus on being an “inclusive gospel-centered community.” We are going to look at a part of what it means to be an inclusive gospel-centered community.

Let's read Ephesians 3:1-13.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

This passage tells us about: (1) the two halves of the gospel; (2) being a servant of this gospel; and (3) how it changes everything.

II. First, the two halves of the gospel

Paul is talking about this amazing gospel, this good news. He has been saying that the good news is that even though we are messed up more than we know, and subject to God's judgment and wrath, because of his amazing love for us, God has come in the person of Jesus Christ and died for us to satisfy the justice of God and to bring us to a relationship with God.

He gives us his life as an example of God's amazing grace even though he was messed up. In fact, he says he is more messed up than all God's people. Verse 8, **“Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”**

Paul grew up in a city called Tarsus, a Gentile city. He was a devoted Jew. He wanted to further his religious education. He was a righteous man according to the Law. He did all the stuff that he was supposed to do and didn't do the stuff he was not supposed to do according to the Law. He was so zealous for the Law and the Tradition of the Elders that he decided to go to Jerusalem and study under the best teacher. He studied under Gamaliel, an influential member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. He became a Pharisee, and a right hand man for the Chief Priest, the leader of the Sanhedrin. He came to believe that the Jesus movement was a heresy. So, he decided to do everything possible to put a stop to the movement. He dedicated his life to doing that. But, Jesus intervened on the road to Damascus. He was going there to persecute and arrest Christians. You can read the story on Acts 9. On the road, he experienced a light from heaven and heard the voice of Jesus: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He became blind and in the city, he was healed by a guy named Ananias. Acts 9:15 says:

“But the Lord said to Ananias, Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

This radically changed him. He was as hostile as you can get to Christianity, but God took a hold of him and changed him.

He is saying that he was not saved because he was righteous. In fact, he says he is the least of all people of God. None of us are saved because we are righteous. You can't be good enough! He says later on that all his righteousness he had as a Pharisee were like filthy rags. Christianity is not about being good enough. It's not about moral values and living by them, and at the end, God sees your good and bad and see whether you're going to heaven or not. Christianity says all of us are screwed up royally, but it is only through God's amazing love and gift that we are saved. It's about receiving God's grace in our lives when we don't deserve it. He is the one who came and chose us, adopted us, forgave us, gave us the Holy Spirit, and prepared heaven for us. We were dead, but he made us alive. We were in bondage and he came and freed us. We were powerless and he gave us power. It's all about the cross. This brings us to reconciliation with God. This brings us to a new identity in Him. We are his adopted sons and daughters. This is amazing stuff.

Then, Paul says there is more to the gospel.

He can't help but to be mesmerized by the mystery of Christ, the gospel that God is bringing people who are very different together and destroying the barriers that divide them. He has been saying that God is out to create a new humanity, a new Kingdom where all people (ethnos which is translated as Gentiles or nations) come together, a new family, a new temple. And now, he says in chapter 3:6 that **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together in one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”** Then, as Jonathan talked about a couple weeks ago, in verse 10, **“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.”** Somehow, when people who are very different from each other come together, manifold wisdom of God is demonstrated to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. As Jonathan mentioned, one of the greatest ways to spiritual warfare is for diverse people to come together as a church.

There are two parts to the gospel: We are reconciled to God. The vertical reconciliation. Then, we are reconciled to people who are our enemies, people who are different than us. The horizontal reconciliation. There are two parts to the gospel: personal salvation and the church. One is personal and the other is communal.

One time, Jesus taught that there are two commandments that are the most important: love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength; and the second is to love our neighbors as yourself.

In response to what Jesus said, a person asked him, “who is my neighbor?”

Jesus then told the story of the Good Samaritan. You know the story. A Jewish man is robbed and left for dead on the street. A priest passes by on the other side. A Levite also passes on the other side. Both, the most respectable people in society pass by on the other side. But, a Samaritan, a hated racial group, is the hero of the story. To Jews, Samaritans were worse than Gentiles. They were half breeds with a bad theology. They were lived wild lives. Think about the Samaritan woman. The last thing Jews wanted to do was to have fellowship with someone like that. In fact, this was a group of people the most unlike themselves. And, Jesus said, this is your neighbor.

You see, we can’t love God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength until he touches us, he demonstrates grace to us, saves us. We just can’t do it. But, he has enabled us to have that relationship.

Then, he says that he is building a church where we actually become brothers and sisters with the Samaritans, the people we used to despise the most. The people we felt superior to. The people we used to feel really uncomfortable around. You see, God is now empowering his people to love people who are very different. That was the purpose from the beginning. He is creating a new kingdom, a new body, a new family, and new temple together.

That was the theology of the gospel that drove Paul: vertical reconciliation and horizontal reconciliation.

That is the two halves of the gospel.

III. Second, Paul became a servant of this gospel.

In verse 7, Paul says: “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power.”

He saw the beauty of the gospel, and he became a servant of the gospel by the grace of God and the power of God.

This means that he structured his life around serving the gospel of Jesus Christ. That was the most important thing. Fighting for the gospel was the purpose and mission of his life.

In fact, Paul was not just fighting for a vertical reconciliation (bring salvation to people personally so that they will become sons and daughters of God), but also for a horizontal reconciliation. In fact, he says in verse 1: **“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus FOR THE SAKE OF YOU GENTILES..”** This was literally true. Paul was in jail because he was fighting for the horizontal reconciliation between the Gentiles and Jews. If you look at Acts, Paul was in Jerusalem and he was arrested because people thought he had brought Gentiles in the temple. That’s what started his imprisonment. Read Acts 21ff.

That’s what led to his arrest. But, he was a Roman citizen which gave him certain rights. He appeared in front of kings and leaders, and because he appealed to Caesar, he was shipped to Rome. That entire adventure story is written in details in Acts. Paul’s passion was not only for vertical reconciliation but also for horizontal reconciliation.

His viewed himself as a servant of the full gospel.

As I think about this, I think the American churches have not been preaching the whole gospel.

On one hand, even the vertical gospel, that of reconciliation, it has made it look like we have to earn it. We have focused on much on politics that if you talk about most people, they think Christianity is about living by biblical moral values to get to heaven. That’s not it at all. But, even if we do a good job with this, and share the good news that it is by grace through faith in Jesus that we are saved, we have still made the mistake of ignoring the horizontal gospel.

The horizontal gospel is the gospel of reconciliation, the gospel of love, the gospel of building a new humanity, a family, a community, a new temple with our enemies, with people who are we are not comfortable with, with people who are different than us.

Why do have we tended to create churches where only people who are like us get together. I am not even talking about multi-ethnic churches. Maybe some churches are in areas where they are all one race. But, I am talking about bringing people who are

very different together into a community, poor and the rich together, the liberals and conservatives together. I think we should try our best to create an inclusive gospel-centered community.

The church has made a big mistake of ignoring the horizontal side of the gospel and I think more and more people are beginning to see it. In the 1970, Fuller Seminary was the leader in what is referred to as the church growth movement. What they taught was that likes attract likes. So, when people planted churches, they used what is called the homogeneous unit principle. Your church will grow the fastest if you target like kind of people. That's why if you look at books like Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren, he talks about Saddleback Sam. He was target Saddleback Sam. The problem is (1) I don't look anything like Saddleback Sam and some of you here really don't look like that guy; and (2) when they target just one kind of people, they are splitting the gospel into two. The focus is only on the vertical and the gospel of reconciliation is completely out the door. At least we need to pursue racial and socioeconomic reconciliation.

That's the vision of New City Church. We believe that creating an inclusive gospel-centered community is the gospel of reconciliation. I have to tell you that this is something that I am learning more and more. At first when I planted this church, I didn't know how important this was. I only thought it was important because of the context. The downtown has so many diverse people. If we are going to plant a church here, we had to reject the homogenous unit principle. But, now, I know that this is the vision for church in the NT.

I have now become a servant of this gospel. I am ordained minister, and when I was ordained, I was ordained a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am fully committed to both the gospel of reconciliation with God—that of loving God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strengths—and the gospel of reconciliation with people who are not comfortable with each other.

We are far from being the community that God is calling us to be. I don't really know how to do this yet. We are learning as we are flying. But, I want to invite you join this journey and become a servant of this gospel.

Now, I know some people think that this gospel of reconciliation at the horizontal level happens mostly in the universal Church and it is not a call to do that in our local

churches. I couldn't disagree more. I believe God is calling us to create real communities, not virtual communities where we keep our distance. It's not like Facebook where we don't community virtually; we are called to do community together. I know some people live in a place where you can't do racial reconciliation between you live only with your race, but I think there could be reconciliation at every level.

IV. When you become servant of this gospel, it changes everything about the way we approach our life.

When Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison because of his stand for horizontal reconciliation. If he left it all for Jews and just hanging out with Jews, Christianity would have become a Jewish sect, and no one really would have persecuted Christianity. It was the horizontal gospel that caused most of the persecution. Paul was willing to die for this. Paul was willing to suffer for this. He was proud to be a prisoner. In fact, he said he is the prisoner of Christ for the sake of the Gentiles. How did Paul handle prison?

He was not at discouraged. He says in verse 13, **"I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are you glory."** He was not only NOT discouraged, he was asking Ephesians not to be discouraged because of his suffering.

I think when we just focus on the vertical relationship, we tend to focus on comfort. God loves us and wants us to be comfortable, we argue. We love God and things look good. But, it is being a good Samaritan that causes suffering. Remember that story, if the Samaritan just walked away because he was too busy or he was too uncomfortable, he would have been more comfortable. He could have just focused on this relationship with God as he knew it and that's it. BUT, he became uncomfortable. He was willing to suffer. That's our call. God is calling us to suffering. For some, that is literal. For some, that means we are called not to the most comfortable place, but a place where we can exercise horizontal reconciliation—where we can love people who are dramatically different than us.

Paul was joyful even in his suffering. Do you see the intensity in his life? Do you see how suffering didn't get to him? He saw it as joy. He saw it as privilege to suffer for Christ. He saw the greatest joy in his life as he was serving this gospel.

I want to invite you to suffer for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Imagine if we call became a servant of the gospel, if this became our purpose and mission for our lives.