

## **Only One Gospel**

Galatians 2:1-10

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### TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter 2:1-10 reads:

"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do."

In this portion of Scripture, we are continuing to consider Paul's autobiography that he gives as a sort of defense for his gospel, demonstrating, as he did in Chapter 1, that his gospel was indeed the gospel of God and was not given to him by mediation from man, nor was he taught it, but rather he received it by revelation of Jesus Christ as he was on the road to Damascus. And obviously, in the subsequent years following that occasion, he preached that very gospel.

He goes on to explain that he did not go up to Jerusalem until fourteen

years later, where he communicated that gospel. He went up and saw Peter for fifteen days only, but he did not confer and consult with flesh and blood from the moment that he received that revelation. He began to preach it and make Christ known to those around him. But now, he goes on in Chapter 2 to explain that he did go up to Jerusalem and he did consult with them, but it wasn't until some fourteen years later.

Now, to understand this portion of Scripture, I want to briefly help us remember the accusations that are being made about Paul. If you remember the Judaizers, these people that are trying to bring the Galatians into bondage and back under the Mosaic law, what they were doing was they were claiming that Paul was no true apostle of Jesus Christ and that he did not receive his gospel from God. Rather, he went up to Jerusalem, got his gospel, and then later distorted it. Now he goes about preaching a free gospel of grace whereby the Gentiles can be part of the people of God apart from circumcision. And this was the accusation that was being leveled against him, which he seeks to destroy.

Now, the way that Paul has done this, as I mentioned, is by autobiography. He shares a sketch of his testimony and he also goes on to show his travel route to prove that he had this gospel long established before he ever went up to Jerusalem. But Paul makes some further argumentation in Chapter 2 that really, as it were, deals a death blow to these accusations.

And the section, verses one through to verse number ten in Chapter 2, is Paul's argumentation, which simply goes like this: "My gospel is God's gospel, and it is also the gospel of the people at Jerusalem, the elders, and apostles." So what he does is, in Chapter 1, he establishes that his gospel is the gospel of God. But in Chapter 2, he links the Jerusalem elders and apostles and shows that we are in one agreement with this same gospel. So there's no point of the Judaizers pitting Paul against Peter because they have the same gospel.

Now, Paul makes his first consultation up to the pillars there at Jerusalem, as they're known by, and he takes with him, as the text says, Barnabas and Titus, which is very significant because Barnabas was a Jew and Titus was a Greek; he was a Gentile. And he takes both of them, and he goes to see Peter, James, and John, of which the Scripture tells us here in verse number two that they were people of reputation and they were people that seemed to be something, so they were people of repute and reputation. And he describes them in verse number nine as pillars of the church. They are simply those people that support, as it were, the church. The pillars function in a kind of foundational sense because they uphold the structure. And in many ways, these apostles were upholding the Jerusalem church and were foundational to its establishment, so consistent with what Paul

says in Ephesians 2:20, that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

Now, Paul doesn't belittle them in any way, these pillars, these elders, and apostles, but he does help the Galatians have a proper understanding of how they should view men. Because what was happening was the Galatians were overestimating these people to the point that the Judaizers could manipulate them to think that these people are greater than Paul and therefore you should trust them rather than Paul. But Paul goes on here to say that they seemed to be something—he used the word "seemed"—and he says that they seemed to be pillars, not belittling them in any way but helping them recognize that we should keep man in his proper place.

He goes on in verse number six to make that even more clear where he says this: "From those who seem to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man." What he's trying to do then, if God shows personal favoritism to no man, neither should we show personal favoritism to no man, but we should let truth triumph over man. Remember that God is the God of truth, and as Paul says, let God be true and every man a liar.

But the Galatians obviously had such an unhealthy high view of the apostles at Jerusalem to the point that they would easily be taken up by the dissimulation and hypocrisy of the Judaizers. And they would just say, "Oh, the Jerusalem elders believe this, Paul doesn't believe that," and straight away they're like, "Oh good, we'll just follow the Jerusalem elders," as opposed to proper examination as to what was happening there.

Now, Paul gives three points here, briefly, that we'll look at, that basically these three points cut the Achilles heel of the Judaizers' accusation. He deals a death blow to it in these three points that he makes here. And the summary of these three points is simply this: "I and Jerusalem are one. I and the apostles are one. And so you should not be taken by these lies and these accusations which are false."

And it begins in verse number three to explain the first way in which they are one. He said, "We agree that circumcision is not required for salvation, and neither should it be pushed upon those who are saved that are Gentiles." Look at what it says in Chapter 2, verse 3: "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." He says, "I took up Titus, a Greek—did he do that deliberately? We don't know. But he took up Titus, who was a Greek with him to Jerusalem, and these apostles themselves did not compel him to be circumcised." And his argument basically is then, "How can the Judaizers that are troubling the churches of Galatia compel the Gentiles in the churches of Galatia to be circumcised

and use Jerusalem as a support? It's far from the truth. When I took a Greek up there with me, a believing Greek, Titus, they didn't compel him to be circumcised. We agree with Jerusalem. Our message is one."

As was read to us in the Bible reading, this was a problem which existed in the early church, and it says in Acts 15:1, "Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'" This was what was troubling the churches, and the Galatians also.

The second point that he makes is basically says, "We agree not only did they not compel Titus to be circumcised and therefore was demonstrating that circumcision is not a requirement to be part of the people of God, he also said we agree that our gospel is one gospel." He says, "It is one gospel." Look at Chapter 2, verse 2: "When I went up there by revelation—God told him to go up there—he says, 'and communicated to them that gospel which I preached among the Gentiles.'" So he communicates the gospel which is preached among the Gentiles. Jump down to verse number six: "It says at the end of verse number six, 'for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.'" The reason why I'm tying in these two things together is because the word "communicated" means to lay out before. And what Paul says, "I went all the way up to Jerusalem and I laid out before the apostles that gospel that I preached." And in verse number six, he uses a similar word, a compound word but a similar word that is used in verse number two where it says, "and they added nothing to me." And what that means is, "I laid out open before them that gospel, and they laid nothing beside it or nothing on top of it." What he's simply saying is, "I spread out my gospel before them, and they didn't add anything to it or lay anything beside it." They, in other words, received it as true revelation from God. And therefore, we agree our gospel is one. How then can you say, "Oh Judaizers, that Jerusalem teaches a different gospel than Paul, and Paul had perverted it?"

And lastly, he says here, "We agree, and they agree—Jerusalem and I are one. They went so far as to extend the right hand of fellowship to me." Look at verse number seven of this chapter two: "But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." And the right hand of fellowship is more than just an agreement, but it is more like a partnership in the gospel, that they joined as one together for the gospel. And they received not only Barnabas but myself, but we together served the Lord, and they received our ministry

as being true, no different to that of Peter's.

Now, why was the agreement with Jerusalem important? And what Paul seems to point out here is that the ministry—sorry, let me just rephrase—that it's not the approval of Jerusalem because they didn't approve his gospel in a sense that they ratified it, but this agreement together that they together share in the same gospel. This was important for the advancement of that gospel. Verse number two of chapter two, look what Paul says there, Galatians 2:2: "He says at the end of verse two, 'lest by any means I might run or had run in vain.'" Now, Paul is not doubting his gospel because he's just been teaching and establishing it, saying, "I didn't even have to go up to Jerusalem to get my gospel or for them to say that my gospel was right and therefore they approved of me and signed on the dotted line so they sanctioned me to preach." This is not what he's referring to here. He's not doubting what he was preaching for fourteen years before he came up to Jerusalem and saying, "Now I've got my confidence." But Paul was keenly aware of the fact that if there would be accusations that will continue to go on, pitting Peter, as it were, against Paul and Jerusalem against Paul, and this was to continue to spread, that people would not receive the ministry of Paul and would doubt the gospel that he preached. Not that Paul needed any assurance about the gospel, but rather that the gospel might continue on in its effective work in the lives of those that Paul had preached it to.

So what Paul recognized here is that what was important for the advancement of that gospel was agreement and unity between myself and the elders and apostles at Jerusalem. What the Judaizers were trying to do was to destroy a bridge between Paul and Jerusalem. But what Paul was doing is building a bridge between himself and Jerusalem so that that gospel might continue to have free course. What Paul was saying is, "We strive together for the faith of the gospel with the people at Jerusalem and also in the Gentile churches."

Doesn't this remind you of the high priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ and the importance of unity for the advancement of the gospel? Jesus says in John 17:21, "That they also may be one in us, that the world may know and believe that You have sent Me." What Jesus is saying is the unity of God's people in Me, in us, regarding the person of God and the work of Christ and those things which make for the unity of the Godhead and the beliefs of the fundamentals of the faith, "that they may be one in us, that the world may know that You have sent Me." Jesus is basically saying that the unity of the Christian church would serve to the advancement of the gospel in the world, would serve to show that Christ is indeed Lord and King over all His people.

And so it's important for the advancement of the gospel that there would be

agreement, lest Paul's ministry would prove to be in vain. But another point that we need to recognize is that it was important for gospel clarity that the Jerusalem apostles and Paul would agree. Look at chapter 2, verses 3 and 4 of this text: "Yet not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." What Paul is saying here is that there were false brethren, people that proclaimed themselves to be Christian, that were no Christians at all, who were coming into the assemblies and causing a kind of division amongst the people of God. And these false brethren were coming in by stealth, and they were making this chaos in the church. And what Paul is saying is that providentially provided an occasion, which is amazing—God's providence—that providentially provided an occasion for the agreement. You see, the false brethren that came in unawares and were causing a mess created a platform and an opportunity for the Jerusalem elders and apostles and myself to basically declare that this is the true gospel and give gospel clarity and say, "They are false brethren."

And that's a very important thing that comes from unity also. You see, unity does not only help with the advancement of the gospel, but true unity around the gospel gives clarity to the gospel. Let me give you two scenarios that might help you, two hypothetical scenarios. Let's say Peter, James, and John said, "Hey, look, we don't want to upset these Judaizers. Look, Titus, just get circumcised. I know you're a Greek. I know you don't have to do it, but hey, let's just compromise so that there can be peace in the churches and let it go. These Judaizers want circumcision to be part of the gospel, and that's the kind of way they do the gospel, and this is the kind of way we do the gospel." Then imagine Peter, James, and John just said, "Hey, let's just let them do it and don't worry about that. We don't want to offend these false brethren. We don't want to stand with Paul against them and say that circumcision is not a requirement for Gentile believers." Don't you think that would have blurred the lines of the gospel? Can't you see how that would have caused there to be more confusion amongst the churches of Galatia and what Paul's trying to do and what Jerusalem's trying to do? Well, that would be akin to ecumenism, wouldn't it? We don't want to offend people that profess Christianity, so it doesn't matter if they're Mormons, it doesn't matter if they're Roman Catholics, it doesn't matter what they are. And in fact, let us spread the net even broader and include Muslims and all kinds of other people that profess that there is one God, and let's worship the same God together. And immediately, that kind of compromise, what it seeks to do, is blur the gospel.

So if Peter, James, and John submitted themselves to the dictates of those that preached another gospel, then the Galatians to the day which is to be

written would still be confused about what that true gospel is. I think we can say that ecumenism has done that, hasn't it? In many ways, God's people, or people that profess Christ, they don't know what the gospel is anymore. Now the gospel has become so vague as just believing in God and believing in Jesus. Which Jesus? Which God? Because my Bible tells us that there is another Jesus, that there is another gospel, and there is another spirit. And so therefore, we can see that this scenario, if it played out that way, would have led to there being less gospel clarity and more gospel confusion.

But let's give a scenario two. Let's say Peter, James, and John, although they agreed that Titus didn't have to get circumcised as a Greek and that you can be part of the people of God apart from circumcision, let's just say they started to get angry at Paul and say, "Paul, mate, wherever you go, you're causing trouble. Mate, wherever you go, you're stirring up issues here. Just take it easy." Imagine they said, "You know what? We're going to separate from Paul. Making life difficult for us, and his style is different, and he's going out to these Gentiles. And you know what's better? It's better we just focus on the Jews, and we get rid of this guy and just let him do his thing. But let's separate from him and not give him the right hand of fellowship, and may God be with him." And they didn't work together with Paul, and they did not affirm that Paul's message was true, but they just let him go do his thing and separate it from him.

And even though they agreed with Paul on the gospel, they just thought he's just too complicated of a person to get close to. "You know that Paul. Always causing havoc." Well, I would argue that that would also equally blur the gospel. In what way? Well, think about the Galatians now. Jerusalem, they're not unified with Paul. And the Judaizers are saying that the church is so divided, then you know what, who knows what we can believe anymore? And the gospel lines get even more blurred. In fact, some of the gospel gets so tightened up that it gets overtightened that it gets changed. "Okay, now a true believer is one that doesn't associate with Paul. Now a true Christian is not only one that believes these things but that separates from that person." And therefore, we would say that is the problem of modern fundamentalism, wouldn't we? Where there is such division in the Christian church and in the body of Christ to the point that everyone is false, so that we don't even know anymore how to think in categories of what is false and damnable and what is just false and erroneous. And therefore, we can still work together for the sake of the gospel.

You see, either way, either one of these things would have posed the same problem. But what Paul is showing us here in this text of Scripture is that the unity of God's people around the true gospel is vital against error and it is vital for gospel advancement and gospel clarity. So that Christian unity

around the gospel of Jesus Christ is something that would advance that gospel and would give gospel clarity to what the gospel really is.

Now, this was all necessary because of false brethren. And we would be silly to think that there are not false brethren that still plague the church today. Look what it says in verse number four and verse number five of this text: "And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." And Paul says that these Judaizers, these ones that were false brethren, they are subtle and they are deadly. And why are they subtle and why are they deadly? Because they were causing unnecessary distinctions among the people of God which God did not make. They were essentially saying that unless you're circumcised, you're not part of God's people, and they were separating the Jew from the Gentile. They were erecting that middle wall of partition which God had torn down by the blood of the cross of His Son. And what Paul was showing here is that they're dangerous and they're deadly. They come in secretly, they come in by stealth, and by the way, they come in quite zealously to say, "Hey, there's more that we can do here for Christ, there's more that we should be doing, more that we should be doing with regards to our gospel, and there's more to be understood about the gospel," and they go on to advance that into a law-works gospel. And Paul says that ultimately what they do would bring people into bondage. Isn't that amazing? It would lead them to be bound in the chains which Christ had set them free from. And they would do this by outlawing liberties that were won for us in Christ, all in the name of holiness.

You know, the problem with the Judaizers was they were saying God said when He did not say. And they were bringing people under the law when Christ had set them free. They were manipulating the Scriptures, in this particular case, circumcision, and they were basically turning liberties into laws and creating legalism. Let me give an example, two examples. In Romans chapter 14, Paul says when it comes to matters of food, days, and drink, these are Christian liberties; let no man judge anyone with regards to these things. It's Christian liberty. In 1 Corinthians chapter number seven, he goes on to say also that in chapter number seven of 1 Corinthians that "I wish that all men were even as myself, but each one has his own gift from God, one in this matter and one in that matter." That's talking about marriage, or he's talking about celibacy or living a life that you believe God has called you to singleness. Two things that are pure, wonderful liberties that we have in Christ Jesus. There's no law to be married. There's no law to remain unmarried. There's no law regarding drinks and meats and days of worship and feast days and other things.

I want you to go to 1 Timothy chapter number four with me just briefly, and I want to show you this as we draw some application together. I want you to see the method of Judaizers. Here are things that God has given us liberty. Means there can be distinction. We have freedom. There can be distinction in the church of God regarding these things, but not such distinction that separates us from one another. Not such distinction that we should force others to do those things or even compel them to do those things which God has not compelled them to do. I want to go to 1 Timothy chapter four, verses one to three. I want you to see how much God hates such legalism. First Timothy chapter number four, verse one: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and listen to this word, doctrines of demons." Must be pretty bad doctrine. "Speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." Listen to these words now: "Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." I think you were thinking when you heard doctrines of demons that you were waiting for someone to start worshipping Satan or something that they were doing. But what Paul goes on to say that these people give way to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, and what that amounted to, at least in this case here, is that they forbid people to be married, and they command—they're the two words that you need to understand here—they command that you abstain from foods which God has given us freely to eat with thanksgiving. What is Paul saying here? He's saying for those people that take those liberties which we have in Christ Jesus and cause people to come under bondage, they are teaching doctrines of devils. In other words, legalism is a doctrine of devils that brings people into bondage and brings people under the law and helps them and moves them away, should I say, from the freedom which they have in Christ Jesus, secured by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, upon the cross.

You can see those things which were liberties when they became laws, they ought to be regarded as doctrines of devils. And so, in Galatians chapter number two, verse five, how are we meant to deal with these false brethren? Well, Paul doesn't shy away from how they are meant to be dealt with. In Galatians chapter 2, verse 5, he says, "To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." You know what he says here? Zero tolerance. We're not going to have it. We're not going to have people lead people into bondage and work contrary to what Christ has done through the cross in saving and setting people free. Because Paul saw a greater problem here. It wasn't a matter of circumcision or uncircumcision; it was a matter of the cross of Jesus Christ. For Paul, this was a matter of whether or not the people of Galatia would continue to look to Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, who bought them with His own blood, or whether their eyes would be turned now to

things that they must do in order to inherit the kingdom of God and to be pleasing in the sight of God. And Paul says, "We did not yield to it; we did not give ourselves to it; we did not submit to it, no, not even for one hour." Why, Paul? Why didn't you submit yourself to it for one hour? He says, "We gave it not even an inch." He says, "That the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

And Paul says, "As soon as I let legalism creep into the lives of God's people, and we do not draw the line where it ought to be drawn, what ends up happening is the truth of the gospel becomes distorted and blurred, and people start no longer trusting in Jesus Christ, the rock of their salvation. No longer trusting in Jesus Christ, the one and only mediator between God and man. They start looking to sacraments, or they start looking to other things and the deeds that they do to satisfy God. They start looking to their outward conformity, whether or not, as it were, in this case, circumcised or uncircumcised, but even more than that, whether or not they're dressed appropriately. You know, whether or not they attend every service of the church—these are important things, very important things, but they're not the gospel. They're not the gospel. Whether they believe every doctrine that we confess here in this church or not, and if they don't, maybe they're not saved. Well, what's the gospel? You see, as soon as we do that, we start to blur the gospel and simply imply that having all your doctrine ordered perfectly is what makes one truly right with God. If that was the case, I've never been right with God and will never be right with God. The day I was converted, I tell you, my doctrine was not all in order, and still to this day. Paul is not saying these things aren't important, but what he's simply saying is as soon as we make unity more than that which is the gospel, and we magnify the peripherals of the faith which are important, what ends up happening is we can't see clearly anymore as to who's true brethren and who's false brethren. All of a sudden, everyone who is not Reformed Baptist is a false brother, which is far from the truth.

You see, the Bible doesn't paint a picture to us of all these variations and paints that picture and saying, therefore, if they're a variation of any sort, that they're false. No, it says that there are wheat and tares. It says that there are sheep and there are goats. And what makes someone a sheep or a goat, yes, is their understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and their faith in Jesus Christ. And so then, what the church must do is, although we understand that the denominations that exist within Christendom are not a bad thing—of course, they exist because of practical implications, and we can function together—but we must be very careful, lest we turn denominationalism into sectarianism and simply say that the people of God exist in Baptist churches or in whatever churches, Presbyterian churches, whatever it is, and that the people of God and God's work doesn't extend beyond them.

I don't want to get into my next week's sermon too much, but we're going to talk about the right hand of fellowship and get into that a little more. But do you see the significance of this issue? It's vitally important. And what Paul says, as soon as I magnify, as those Judaizers were, that which Christ does not magnify, and that gospel which God does not magnify, then we start to blur and distort the truth of the gospel. What Paul says, "I join with Jerusalem, and Jerusalem joins me, despite our various differences and ministry style and things that we do, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Can I just say this? The truth of the gospel will forever continue because God's word will not pass away. But understand this: it may not continue with you. There are many denominations that began preaching this gospel that we preach, that generations after held on to those particulars that made them that denomination that they were, but no longer preached that gospel which saved them. They became to be identified in their fundamental identity by those particulars so much so that Christ was out the door, the gospel was out the door, and they still practiced externally their own beliefs.

What Paul is simply saying to the churches of Galatia, and the lesson that we should learn today, is how important is the gospel to us? And I'm not just saying the gospel proclamation—how important is the gospel proclamation to us, how important is its truth to us, how important are its implications to us? And have we, in our lives, been guilty of blurring the gospel by over-exaggerating and causing division where division was not meant to be had? Or by pure ignorance to false gospels creeping in and just saying, "Hey, we're all one"? For some, it's compromise; for others, it's being over the top in views of their separation, but the problem is this: that by doing either of those, we blur the truth of the gospel.

But Paul tells us here, and we need to learn also, that there is only one gospel. And because there is only one gospel, there is only one people of God. And because there is only one people of God, there is only one body of Christ. And because there is only one body of Christ, then you don't get to choose who your brothers and sisters are in Jesus Christ. You have false brethren; you have true brethren. Just like you don't get to choose your brother and sister in your own physical family, I've got news for you: you don't get to choose your brother and sister in your own spiritual family. But it is ours to both understand and ours to grapple with that God's work in the sphere of the kingdom of heaven proceeds and advances far beyond the four walls of this community center in which we meet today. And the truth of the gospel must continue on with us by our declaration of that truth, by not blurring its lines.

And let me just have a word to fathers. Fathers, this is your duty—part of your duty in the Christian in your household is to help your family walk the gospel way so that they do not fall in the pit of legalism or in the pit of antinomianism or ecumenism, whereby all is accepted as one. It is the job and duty of Christian fathers to lead the charge in their homes, yes, to put a difference between the holy and the profane, but carefully helping your children understand that the things that you believe and practice do not make you Christian. And therefore, the belief and practice regarding those peripheral doctrines don't make you Christian. And therefore, it is our duty as heads of the home to exalt the gospel in our household as that one glorious truth by which our children love and adore, lest they think that Christianity is more than the gospel and that Christ is not enough.

Let us pray.