

The Right Hand of Fellowship

Galatians 2:7-9

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Let us turn to Galatians 2, beginning in verse 1:

"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 text of Scripture, we have a reminder of the unity that was found between Paul and the Apostles at Jerusalem—a unity that helped provide gospel clarity and also aided in the advancement of that very gospel. Last week, we considered how that unity was vital for Christians on the fronts of clarity and advancement, but this morning, we're going to consider the question: To whom then should we extend the right hand of fellowship?

The climax of their unity was when Peter, James, and John extended that right hand of fellowship to Paul. This was a partnership in the gospel that demonstrated gospel clarity against the false brethren, but more than that,

it also helped with the advancement of the gospel so that the people in the region might know that there is one gospel, one Jerusalem, in the preaching of the message of salvation.

So then, the question inevitably comes to us: Who should we extend the right hand of fellowship to? The history of the church has a sad history in many respects with regards to this question. Although there has been much unity amongst God's people, there have been pockets of division that have done a lot of hurt and damage to people and even to the gospel itself. There have been severe reactions to differences in baptismal persuasion amongst believing Christians. Healthy disagreement, no doubt, yet over-reactions have led even to violence between fellow brothers and sisters in Christ because of their differences regarding that doctrine.

The history of the church shows us also some very harsh attacks upon God's people with regards to the Lord's Supper. The Protestant Reformation settled the issue that the bread and wine are not transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. However, sub-questions to that question also led to harsh discussions and separation that caused great schism in the church in those early years.

Sadly, the Christian Church has also gone on to not only have doctrinal differences but even social differences. There have been issues in churches with regard to whether people of colored skin should worship with those that are white. I praise God for a multicultural church and the wonder of that, which shows that Jesus Christ purchases His people from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation to with one voice assemble to the praise of God. But it has been the sad reality of church history that there has been division even in regards to those things.

Now, this question regarding to whom should we extend the right hand of fellowship is not a very easy question to answer, particularly in the practical applications of it. Of course, some of the examples that I've given, in a general sense, we may agree to quite well, but what does that then look like in the lives of God's people? How does that play out in the practical implications of our unity together?

I understand that there are inherent difficulties to this question. To what extent can people of differing beliefs that are evangelicals work together for the sake of the gospel? Can people of different persuasions when it comes to baptism be in the same eldership team? There are a lot of questions that are raised by these kinds of things, which I don't seek to answer all at this present time. But the thing that we need to understand is that this sermon is not simply to say that these discussions are not important, and neither is it to say that denominational differences are unimportant.

A wrong way to respond to this question is basically to say, "Forget the differences that exist among us entirely," and that there be, in one sense, no limitation. I think you will find quickly that a church like that would descend into chaos or would cause us to have no backbone and conviction about any of the things that we believe, which will do a lot of damage to the advancement of the gospel and the preaching of the gospel and the power of God amongst His people.

We are called on to uphold every word of God. We are called on to love and cherish all of Scripture. We are called upon to believe every word of Scripture and to teach every word of Scripture. Therefore, the commitment of preachers and the commitment of the people of God is to be committed to every text of Scripture and, by their conviction as a priesthood of believers, to be able to interpret Scripture for themselves with the help of the Holy Spirit and to come to certain conclusions.

So, it's important to realize that this is not a sermon that would seek to cause that kind of unhelpful unity, if I could say. But let me think of a helpful way to approach this question. We can approach this question with a question. We can ask then, "Who is the enemy?" That's a good question to ask when it comes to a matter of unity. Who is the enemy of God's Church? Who is the enemy of man's soul? We know that he's Satan, who schemes against God's people.

And Christians, in relationship to this issue, should never forget the fact that no matter our differences that exist within the evangelical world and within Christians of the Church of Jesus Christ, we are all sharers of the same enemy, and we all have the same commitment to the same gospel. That's if we are true believers in Jesus Christ. So sometimes, as we delve into the particular differences that exist amongst Christians, we lose sight of that big picture, that we actually all have one enemy, and we all have that same gospel that has joined us together as one. Therefore, we are brothers and sisters.

And I think what needs to happen with God's people is that we need to be reminded of that from time to time. And sometimes that big picture helps us. Although in our differences, we can pull back and know how we can work together with a view to that big picture. I think a good example of that is even on a natural level, is when there are natural disasters in a community, or even when there if there were to be an invading army that would come into the Australian shores this very moment, you will find that the attention and focus of the people would not be so much on whether or not their neighbor frustrated them because his lawn is too high and they didn't cut it, or whatever it may be, even more important issues than that.

But the point is this: there would be a sort of unity that we would unite with one cause on one front against one enemy. And therefore, there would be a sense in which we would, yes, still have differences, but better know how to express those differences for the sake of the battle.

And I think this is an important way of viewing this. But I think before we move into the text itself, it is also important to hear the word of Jesus on this matter as well. When Jesus's disciples in Mark 9:38-40 saw other people that were casting out demons in Jesus's name, but they were not following Jesus and His disciples, this is what they said to Jesus: "Teacher, we saw someone who doesn't follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us." But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side."

And this is really the question that is at play here. Is the Apostle Paul on the side of the Jerusalem Church or not? And we see this right hand of fellowship extended to him as a way of a public declaration, or at least for an affirmation, that we are one in our gospel and one in our mission.

Now we have to understand that these people did not know Paul for very long. It's not like Paul was all the time in Jerusalem. He went for fifteen days, and he saw Peter, but he didn't see the rest of the Apostles. And it's not like these guys really had sat down for hours and hours and months and years on end before they extended the right hand of fellowship to him. They heard about his ministry, they saw the effects of his ministry, they saw the fruit of the ministry, and they heard and understood that his gospel was in line with the truth of the gospel that they had also received. And that was sufficient then for the extension of the right hand of fellowship.

Look with me in verse number seven of our text, and I want us to see how did Peter, James, and John perceive and understand, and what do they understand and perceive that caused them to extend the right hand of fellowship to Paul. Look at chapter 2, verse number 7, it says, "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."

Now, Paul is pointing out here that these elders and these Apostles at Jerusalem, they perceived something, and they saw something that was the ground by which they extended that hand of fellowship and united with

Paul for the sake of the gospel. What did they see? What did they perceive? Well, they observed something that caused them to recognize and understand that this man is a true brother and a true fellow servant of Christ.

First, they saw the gospel. Notice what he says in verse 7, "When they saw in verse 7 that the gospel for the circumcised was committed to me, the uncircumcised had been committed to me." When they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me as the gospel was committed to Peter, the gospel of the uncircumcised is not a different gospel, by the way. It's not what Paul's saying here, that Peter had one gospel and I had another one. He's talking about not a difference in that sense but a difference of sphere of ministry by which that gospel would extend to.

And here they saw that he had the gospel, the true gospel. Although the ministry was more particularly towards the uncircumcised, to the Gentiles, they still recognized that Paul had the gospel. They recognized that he had the gospel and the gospel had been committed to him, that it was not something that he crafted or that he created, was not something that he designed and that he manufactured and manipulated. It was something that God had given to him, as we looked previously, by revelation of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. And they received him because they saw that the gospel was committed to him.

And when we say the gospel, we are not talking about just a very weak understanding of the gospel. When it was committed to him, it was the revelation of Jesus Christ that was committed to him. You see, the gospel is a Trinitarian revelation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the redemption of man. That includes the holiness of God, that includes the sinfulness of man, that includes the saving work of Jesus Christ and the love of God in sending His Son to save sinners from their sin. That includes the saving work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and giving life to the dead so that those who believe on His name are marked by a power of a new life. This is the gospel.

If we have a gospel that doesn't save and doesn't result in any kind of regeneration, then we do not have a gospel at all. If we have a gospel of Jesus, but this Jesus is not very God of God, then we do not have a perfect sacrifice that can suffer for sins. If we have a gospel that does not have God as holy, who demands justice from His creatures, which is satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ, then what gospel do we have?

And I think when we come to understand this, that it's not just simply a gospel that is just simply, "Oh yeah, Jesus died for sinners," and that's it. We must understand that there are truths that undergird that reality that

make that reality the truth that it is. And when we talk about the gospel, we're not just talking about the person of Christ and the work of Christ and this Trinitarian aspect to it, we also talk about the way of salvation.

You see, the gospel is good news, and therefore it tells man that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. Paul's about to go through to unfold this gospel ever so clearly to the Galatians that you cannot satisfy the righteousness of God by our own good works. And therefore, when Paul says, and Peter, James, and John saw that the gospel was committed to Paul, it was a gospel different to the false brethren that preached circumcision inclusive in justification.

And so therefore, we can't just say because someone believes in Jesus that therefore they have the gospel. If we see the gospel committed to somebody, we are talking about the entire gospel, the gospel which saves. And so they saw that. They saw that. They saw that Paul's gospel was true. And part of the power, part of the way in which they recognized that gospel was true, is because of the effects of that gospel and what it was doing in the ministry of Paul.

Here are people being saved from works religion into the grace of Jesus Christ, glorying in the salvation that they now have in Him. Here are people that were once afar off and separated, even Jew and Gentile, now reconciled together in one body through the blood of that cross, and that middle wall of partition has been broken down, and they're glorying in Christ Jesus and united together in one. Here are people that were turning from idols to God to serve the living and true God.

And so the Apostles saw that this man, Paul, what he preaches is having that same effect in what our gospel is as well. And so we see that they saw that there was this same gospel. And he goes on to talk about the same effects of that gospel, especially when he goes on to verse number eight and verse number nine. Let's read that together, verse eight and nine. He says, "For He who worked effectually in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectually 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."

What is Paul saying here? Not only did they see my gospel, but they saw the grace of God. They saw the grace of God as an effectual working of God that demonstrated that God was moving through him, working with him for the proclamation of that gospel. Notice the passiveness of all the statements that are being made here, and it helps us to realize that they were witnessing the work of God and therefore could not deny it.

This is what the text is almost showing us here, verse number seven, verse eight, verse nine. He says, "When they saw that the gospel had been committed to me, God committed the gospel to Paul. When they saw that He who worked effectually in Peter was working also effectually in me. And here we go, the power of God being manifested not only in Peter's ministry but in Paul's ministry. And then in verse number nine, it says, "When they saw that, then they perceived that grace had been given to me, that they extended the right hand of fellowship."

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of Peter, James, and John this very moment. Here are people that are seeing a man that they have not known for very long, they have heard of, but they are seeing that his gospel is straight, and they're seeing undeniable evidence of the power of God working in his life and ministry. What are they to do with such a man? How are they to respond to such a man? Are they going to go on to say, "Well, we don't like everything Paul does. His style is different. His emphasis is different. You know, he's just not really like us down here at Jerusalem. Think the whole Gentile ministry is getting to his head. It loosens up with Jews and Gentiles together, and they eat, and then there's pork on the table, and look, we know they can eat pork, but we don't really like what's going on here. You know, it makes us feel a little bit uncomfortable."

"Now he's telling these people that they're not meant to be judged on whether they keep the Sabbath day or new moons and feasts and festivals. I mean, these things have been given to us for thousands of years, and God gave them to us, and this guy's just almost like saying, 'Big deal.' Now, there's something wrong. We can see the gospel; he's got that right, but we don't want to work with this bloke. He's trouble."

"Or we can see that he's got the gospel, and we can't deny the power that exists in his life and the fruit of his ministry, but hey, he'll cramp our style if we join hands with this guy. Imagine doing a conference with Paul. What a mess. Imagine having Paul as a guest speaker, right? You could imagine what's going on in the hearts and minds of these people. But they could not deny what was happening before their eyes as the evident work of God."

"And let me just say this, what they were seeing was this: that God had received Paul. And the question came to them, 'Why should not we receive Paul?' You see, the evidence of the grace of God in his life and the truth of the gospel that he proclaimed were the evident marks that God had received this person as one of His own and put His stamp and mark on his life. And for Peter, James, and John, they had to ask themselves, 'Do we recognize this man as a brother who proclaims the truth, who is having the power of God ministering in his life and the effects of his ministry, or are

we going to deny all that and not extend to him the right hand of fellowship for other reasons?"

"Now, I want to just make a point about something, and that is this: if you track through the Bible, you will find that there is something in Scripture that comes through in this text, and that is this: that God sets His mark and seal on His people and on His servants. And that mark and seal is an evident token of God's receiving of them. You find this wherever you go in the text of Scripture, and I'll point it out to you in several ways just to help us understand this."

"A seal in the ancient world was a stamp or a mark that was pressed on a letter to close it up, yes, to protect it, yes, but it went beyond that also as a mark of validation and a mark of ownership. So when a king would set his seal on a letter or something like that, it would mark the ownership of that letter as coming from the king, that that letter belongs to the king. And not only that, it is a letter of validation that it is validated by the king, and therefore, in a very special way, that letter was marked out and set apart as that which the king both approved and validated and accepted and received as coming from him."

"And in the very same way, the Scripture shows us that God sets His seal not on letters but on people to show the very same thing. And these seals, if it were, are distinguishing marks of God's gracious operations upon the hearts and lives of men that are an undeniable evidence of the power of God and the grace of God and the approval of God. And this begins first and foremost with Christ. The Bible teaches us regarding Christ in Isaiah 42:1, "Behold My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!" You see that approval, you see that expression, what He says here, "I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."

And so here, God sets His seal, as it were, upon Christ by giving the Spirit to Him without measure on the day of His baptism. It is more clearly displayed, is it not, when the Spirit descends like a dove upon Him, and the voice comes out from heaven, and God says, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God set His seal upon His Son, even so much that Jesus Himself said that in John 6:27, Jesus says this about Himself, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

That is, on the Son of Man, His seal on Him as the one who comes bearing the message of eternal life, the one whom God has spoken to in His last days through His Son. And here we see the seal of God, as it were, on His own Son. But not only that, the Bible teaches us that God seals also His

people. The Bible teaches us in Ephesians that we have been sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise. The Holy Spirit marks out and distinguishes God's people from the people of this world by His power, by His fruits, by His regeneration, by His indwelling, by His work, by His ministry. So God gives His Spirit to His people as an evident token that they belong to Him, that He approves of these people, they are mine, they're accepted in the beloved, and I have set My seal upon them.

And you can track this right throughout the rest of Scripture. But even more than that, you look in a passage like this and other passages where you see that God gives gifts and He gives graces to His ministers and to His people, which are not manufactured and cannot be manufactured, that are evident tokens of God's blessing and power upon them and acceptance of their work. We read it this morning, the Ascended Lord gives gifts unto men. These are His people that He has set apart and given power and grace to for His work. So He's done that to His people.

I want you to turn with me quickly as we come to make some application to Acts chapter 11, verse 20 to 24, because something very similar to what happened here in the book of Galatians happens in Acts chapter number 11. In Acts chapter number 11, I want us to see this here, Acts 11:20-24. I want you to get the context of what's happening here. "Some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord."

"The news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord." I want you to see what's happening in this passage of Scripture. Here is a dispersion of believers going out, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the church of Antioch is established, not necessarily by a particular church planter, but by people who believed in Jesus Christ and proclaimed the gospel in the name of Jesus. And there is an undeniable work of the power of God and the proclamation of His gospel, and people are being converted.

And this goes to the ears of the church of Jerusalem, and they say, "Man, what's going on here? Let's find out what's happening. Barnabas, go check it out." Barnabas goes to check it out, and what does he see? The Bible says when he was there, he saw the grace of God and was glad. And in one way, he joined with them in the right hand of fellowship. Later, you'll find Saul and Barnabas going up at Antioch, and that's the very church that sends them out on their first missionary journey.

What caused Barnabas and what caused Paul and what caused Jerusalem to receive Antioch? The grace of God and the proclamation of the gospel. And they said, "These are our people. If God has accepted them, who are we to despise them?"

Now, this sermon is not a call to doctrinal minimalism or ignorance about doctrine. We ought to work out our doctrine, we ought to discuss our doctrine, we ought to believe our doctrine, we ought to be persuaded by our doctrine, and we ought to seek to find ways to, you know, to help build up the saints in sharpening one another in the word of truth. But understand this, if ever you make your doctrinal differences that are not the gospel differences or fundamental to the Christian faith, that very basis by which you separate from a brother and treat that brother like a false brother, then you have taken this way too far.

You see, Paul's not afraid to confront Peter in the very next verses to say, "Peter, you're wrong." And the Bible is not teaching us not to rebuke one another at all by these texts of Scripture. But what it is teaching us is that that's your brother. Be careful how you treat your brother. Be careful how you treat your sister. Be careful how you extend your fellowship to them despite your differences. Unite together in some way to proclaim the name of Jesus for the advancement of the gospel and to help bring gospel clarity between the unbelievers and the believers. But do not tighten up and draw the lines too sharply that no longer do you receive them as a brother and sister in Christ, but they are to you no different to a false teacher.

We should extend the right hand of fellowship to all those who proclaim the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to all those who evidently have that gospel working effectually in their midst as a manifestation of God's acceptance of them. It is not for us to choose our brothers and sisters in Christ. You might say, "They don't use the same translation as us." Big deal. "Well, you know, they don't believe the earth is as young as I believe the earth is." They believe God created it, you say. "Oh well, they're Arminian and not Calvinist and reformed." Are they your brothers? Are they your sisters?

Let me list a few names of people, and I list a few names of dead people because we're more gracious to dead people than we are to living ones. And I want you to just think on this just for a moment. You may not know all their names, and it's okay if you don't. Think of men like William Booth. Think of men like A.W. Tozer. Think of men like John Owen, Leon Morris, the Wesley Brothers, J.C. Ryle, Charles Spurgeon, E.M. Bounds, John Stott, John Calvin, Martin Luther, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, F.F. Bruce.

You might say in your mind, in your hearing, if you know any of these peo-

ple, like, "These guys were significant people in the Church of Jesus Christ that did great things for the testimony of the Lord." I have just mentioned to you the names of Anglicans, of Baptists, of Presbyterians, of Old Earthers, Young Earthers, great, you know, infant baptizers, Arminians, Calvinists, continuationists, cessationists, and we can go on with the list of various beliefs that exist amongst those people that I have just mentioned.

But there's a common thread between each one of them that causes us not to react with vile reaction to them. We know each one of these men upheld the gospel of Jesus Christ and preached it and made it known and lived according to it. These were holy men, these were righteous men, and these were people that proclaimed the truth of Jesus Christ that advanced His gospel throughout the world. These are people who had the grace of God upon them and were used by God for the glory of His name in the advancement of the kingdom.

And what should we do with such? "Sorry, you're not like me," or do we have to ask ourselves, "In what way may we extend that hand of fellowship to men and women like such in the cause of Jesus Christ?"

So why are you laboring on this so much? Listen, I grew up in a fundamental Baptist Church. If you don't know what that is, look it up online; you'll be gobsmacked. Anyway, and in all fairness, they still are our brothers and sisters in Christ. But I grew up in a church where we would only use the King James only version, old King James, none of this new stuff. We would sing only old hymns, basically, in churches. Getty's Townend, forget it, going down the slippery slope of compromise.

We only believed in the pre-tribulation rapture, and it was upheld as a fundamental doctrine of the faith that if you departed from it, you could be labeled as a false teacher, which evidently I was. And all through my Bible college years, I had one nagging struggle that never left me to this day: it was church history. Because all the people that I looked up to and encouraged me, and all the people that I sought to aspire to and follow them as they followed Christ, were different to me.

I looked at John Wesley's life, and it stirred my heart to seek after God. I read the biography of George Whitefield, and all I wanted to do was preach the gospel like never before. I looked at the life of men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and I thought, "Man, if God would use me in such a capacity in this day." All these men that differed with me on even secondary issues that were important, but what was I going to do with them? And where I came from, if they don't agree with you, just cut them off. Question whether they're even converted, in many cases. But I was confronted with this, and I had to ask myself this question, and it kept nagging in my mind: If God

receives them, why can't you?

And my whole theology of separation that was so tight and so restrictive that separated me from dear brothers and sisters in Christ started to crumble down. And I went back to the Scriptures, and I said, "Lord, I want to know. I want to know, Lord, where is this line of separation? I want to know where You draw it because I'm sick of hurting brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm sick of division in the Church of Jesus Christ. I'm sick of brokenness amongst ministers."

Rob won't mind me saying this; I did not attend Rob A. Youb's ordination service because he was a Calvinist, alright? And he was gracious enough to still love me. But just to give you an idea of how toxic such thinking and mentality could be, to the point, listen to this, that I searched out the Scriptures, and you know what I found? I found that false teachers were not people that believed in Calvinism. They were not people that were Arminians. They were people that denied the Lord who bought them. They were people who denied the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were people who denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were people who would lead souls to hell, and they preached damnable heresy.

And I realized that the sword that was reserved in Scripture for the heretic, I was applying to my own brothers for many years. And I broke down. I can't live like this anymore, Lord. These are Your people. These are Your ministers. And I know I disagree with them on certain points, but Lord, they are Yours. Help me to know how to extend the right hand of fellowship to them for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ.

And my whole sectarian mentality just crumbled before me, and I did a lot of repenting. But I pray that I spare you such by my example and testimony. We have to beware of this pride of sectarianism, where we divide the Church of Jesus Christ into Peter, Paul, Cephas, Christ. "I'm of Paul; I'm of Cephas," you know, "and I'm of Christ," and of Apollos. I love how Paul deals with that. You know what he says? "Was Paul crucified for you? Who died for you? Was it Paul who hung there upon the cross? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Were you identified in the waters of baptism with Paul or with Jesus Christ? Who hung on that cross for you? Who died for you? Whose name are you identified with?"

And then Paul goes on in that very chapter to expound the wonder of that gospel, where God, by His grace, calls out sinners to Himself and makes them one under God in Christ. And he says, "No one can glory in God's presence." Let go of the sectarianism. We must glory in Christ Jesus, who is made unto us wisdom, justification, redemption, sanctification. In other words, Jesus is all in all to God's people.

And I pray that God would help us through the example of Paul and the Apostles here, that we should realize that as our church continues to grow and as we continue to have an impact in the world and in the society in which we are, we will be confronted with opportunities to join hands with other brothers and sisters in Christ that differ from us. And may we be found having that gospel as our forefront attention and having the love of Jesus in our hearts, that we might say, "Brother, sister, let us go and preach Christ Jesus together, that His name might be magnified. Let us join together that the false brethren might be clearly distinguished from the true brethren, and let us do what we can together for the sake of the gospel."

I finish with this quote by J.C. Ryle. He says this: "Keep the walls of separation as low as possible, and shake hands over them as often as you can." Challenging, isn't it, for our natural sectarian disposition? "Keep the walls of separation as low as possible, and shake hands over them as often as you can." And this is how we should respond for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ in reaching the world in the name of Him who died for us and redeemed us with His blood.

Let us pray.