

Ephesians 3:1-12 Sermon

[Title]

“Why can’t we all just get along?”

[Preintroduction]

Thank you Pastor Joe Brown for the news of God’s grace with your ministry. I am humbled by the obedience of God’s servants as they set aside their need for personal accomplishments in order to accomplish His.

Good morning! How are you doing, Cypress Church? My name is Khoi To, and it is my honor to be an intern under Pastor Mike and Pastor Justin. Two godly men from whom I can learn much. I am truly blessed!

Did you hear the one about the poor Pastor Intern and the Barber?

A Rabbi went to the barber shop. After his hair cut, he got ready to pay the barber and the barber said, "No Rabbi, I don't charge the clergy for haircuts." So the next morning the barber found a loaf of Jewish rye bread outside of his door step.

A couple of days past and a Catholic priest came in to get his hair cut. He got ready to pay and the barber said, "No Father, I don't charge the clergy for hair cuts." So the next morning he found a bottle of wine outside his front door step.

A couple of days later the poor Pastor Intern came in to get his hair cut and when he got ready to pay the barber said, "No sir, I don't charge the clergy for their hair cuts." So the next morning, the barber found 15 more poor interns on his doorstep, ready to get their hair cut!

Oh, there is some truth in that because on top of the list of the things that get seminarian students to stampede, it’s free in front of or behind a noun! As proof of this, look at how many interns there are in the Evangelical Free Church!

Thank you for your generosity at my poor attempt of telling a joke!

[Introduction]

Life is mysterious isn’t it? I mean we do not know from day-to-day what’s going to happen and some of us are more likely to turn to horoscopes to reveal some of the mystery of our destiny. This is why throughout the history of mankind, we have come up with so many different ways to try to end the mysteries of our destiny (for instance, the divination industry a multi-billion dollar one). When it concerns our very own or our loved ones futures we want to know the answer now. However, for all believers, we cannot look to any other source to discover our destiny other than the Bible. Indeed,

the Bible prohibits believers from looking anywhere else.¹ The answers to life's most important mysteries are found in this Book!

For instance, have you ever wondered why there are so many denominations? Why one church will absolutely refuse to participate in any activities with another church? This brings up a good mystery, namely, if we are all Christians, why can't we all just get along?

This last January, I was able to go to Israel and there found a sad story that demonstrates the extreme end of division. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is located in Jerusalem. The Church is the traditional site of the hill of Christ's crucifixion and burial. It was built during the time of Constantine, roughly 326AD. The Church has gone through many different owners in its life and now there are at least six faith groups with claims on it. The three main ones are the Greek Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox and the (Latin) Roman Catholic. Three other communities - the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox, the Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox - also possess certain rights and small properties in or about the building, and – get this – with the key to the church is owned by a Muslim family. While there, I saw a ladder resting on the church's ledge. The story goes that in 1860, one of the factions noticed a broken window pane. They put a ladder up but before they can fix the window, another faction pointed out that the window belonged to them. So since the broken window pane belonged to one faction and the ladder belonged to another, the end result was that the ladder was left leaning against the wall under the window pane, from 1860 it remains there today. Why can't we all just get along?

We may laugh at this but isn't there some truths applicable for us? How many of us refuse to be on the same team with another member from the same church? How many of us here are harboring hurts and deep hatred for one another? If history is any indication, there are more than a few handfuls.

[Sub-introduction]

The early church of the New Testament also faced similar problems of getting along. The church would often meet in the homes of believers to share meals. The significance of Jews and Gentiles celebrating the Communion is of the utmost importance for it demonstrated the "new covenant of reconciliation" as instituted by Jesus Christ.

But having different backgrounds do cause tensions. How do the Jewish kosher laws governing the preparation and the types of food fit into the sharing of the meals? How do the laws governing the clean meshed with those that are unclean? How do members, coming from such a divergent backgrounds, become one? I am sure they have asked the same question, "Why can't we all just get along?"

¹ For more information, see Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 27, Deuteronomy 18: 10-12 (note the strict requirement for prophecy accuracy in verses 20-22), 1 Chronicles 10:13–14, Isaiah 8:19–20, Lev. 20:6, 2 Thessalonians 2:9, Mark 13:22, Matthew 12:39-40, 1 Timothy 4:1, 1 John 4:1; Internet resource: <http://www.equip.org/free/DD810.htm>

Please open your Bible with me to Ephesians 3:1-13 so we can see how the Bible answers this most important mystery of how two can become one. That's Ephesians 3:1-13. Are we there yet? Ephesians 3:1-13. Please mark your spot and let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for providing us with Your Word and Your Spirit whom have testified to us, Your Son. We ask for the revelation of your mystery on how people coming from such different backgrounds can unite under one body in order to accomplish Your will. Holy Spirit, we invite you in and ask that you open our hearts to the truth of the Scripture and bless us with wisdom and the strength to carry through the convictions that you have placed in our hearts. Thank you for Your blessings on us. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

There are three major points in the passage that I would like to focus on this morning. These three points are crucial in our understanding from which we will answer, "Why can't we all just get along?"

For the sake of time, I will not read the whole passage but read the verses as they come up.

[Body]

The first point, in the first two blanks of your handout is "God's Grace" for it is by the Grace of God that all things worthwhile are accomplished. The foundation of God's relationship with us rests on His Grace. Without His Grace, we would all be under His Justice. And holy justice, or God's justice, always demands equal retribution or payback. But how can you repay an offense to God? We can't so the end result is death.

Ephesians 3:1-2 reads, "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."

I want to focus on the first point of our passage, "God's Grace" as it appears in the second verse. What is Grace? Grace is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.² Grace is showing favor to someone who doesn't deserve it. Grace is forgiving someone when they don't deserve it. Divine grace is God giving us favor and forgiveness when we don't deserve it. What does Divine Grace look like? Romans 5:6, 8 reads:

²Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology : An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Page 1243. Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.... ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ³

What happens when you pour coke into a glass and it overflows? Does 7-up starts coming out of the glass? Of course not! It is still the same coke that comes out. When God's abundant Grace is poured into us there's so much of it that it overflows.

In post Apartheid South Africa, at one [of the Truth and Reconciliation] hearing, a policeman named van de Broek recounted an incident when he and other officers shot an eighteen-year-old boy and burned the body, turning it on the fire like a piece of barbecue meat in order to destroy the evidence. Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.

The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. "What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?" the judge asked. She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. His head down, the policeman nodded agreement.

Then she added a further request, "Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real."

When justice demands retribution, Grace steps in and covers everything in a warm blanket of forgiveness, acceptance, and relationship. Does God expect us to be this forgiving and full of grace? Read Matthew 18:22-35 for God's expectation of our response to His Grace. When Grace abounds and overflows, what comes out is not justice but Grace.

So our first point, God's grace is the foundation, the anchor of what is to be revealed. "Why can't we all just get along?" Let's move to the second point.

[Second point]

God's Mystery, the mystery of how Jews and Gentiles, can become one, is revealed through Jesus Christ.

³*The Holy Bible : New International Version*, Ro 5:6-8. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984.

Ephesians 3:3-9: 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.

I want to point your attention to verse 6 reads: "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."

What is the Gospel? For Paul's audience, the truth is that Jesus Christ died for Jews and Gentiles so that they can have a relationship with God. The truth for us in this day and age is that Jesus Christ died for me, for you, for that person sitting across the church from you, for your neighbors, for the guy that cut you off this morning while you were driving, for the homosexuals, the adulterous, for those who lie on their taxes, for the prostitutes, for the homeless, for the rich, for those speaking English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Chinese, German, Aramaic, Hebrew, Farsi and yes, even the French; Jesus Christ died for everyone who is wise enough to recognize the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and turning from their life of sin and profess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Savior. And that is the mystery of the unity of believers, that we can all be united under Christ, our Lord and Savior. Why can't we just all get along?

The first point is that God's grace is our foundation, the second point is that the mystery of His grace is in Jesus Christ. The third point is God's purpose.

[Third Point]

Ephesians 3:10-13 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.

God's purpose in revealing the mystery in Jesus Christ is to have us united in the body. When we are working as in the body of Jesus Christ, we are doing more than just

getting along; we are witnessing to the world the power of God. In fact, verse ten tells us that our union in Christ is witnessed even by “the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms”. When the church is united, it slaps Satan in the face and confirms that God’s eternal purpose is in motion.

Why can’t we all just get along? Here are three reasons:

First, God’s Grace, though abundant, spills out of us in altered forms. When we fail to submit to God completely, hate, greed, malice, gossips, envy, perversions, spills out. When we fail to recognize that we, who have been forgiven and are unwilling to forgive others, changes God’s grace to something different, we become the stumbling blocks for all others. The devil delights in knowing that he has a success story in us. He dares to mock God and uses you for as his case-in-point.

Secondly, “we can’t all just get along” because we haven’t fully submitted our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Sure we may profess our faith in Jesus but it is often that we grab back control of our lives and say, “Jesus, just let me fix this and when it is a little cleaner, I’ll give it back to you.” Don’t you know that this is stupidity? I mean the time that we need God the most is when we are trying to deal with our stumbling blocks and it is only by His strength that we can defeat our demons. It’s like having the strongest man next to you and telling him, “Ok, just let me lift this ten ton tractor by myself and as soon as I get it off the ground, you can come in and help.” In regards to our relationship with God, it is not only ridiculous but sinful!

The third reason “why we can’t all just get along” is that we fail to see God’s plan because our plans are in the way. When we succumb to the notion that our pains demands justice first in order for us to respond favorably toward others, we have placed our pride over our convictions. We are here to accomplish God’s purpose not our own because it is God’s glory that we were born to fulfill. It is the only purpose that matters.

So, why can’t we all just get along? ONE, we fail to use God’s grace, TWO, we fail to embrace the truth of God’s mystery in the revelation of unity under Christ, and THREE, we replace God’s purpose with our own.

[Conclusion]

How should we respond?

We should respond by having Faith in Jesus Christ. We must have a right relationship with Jesus Christ first and foremost. Jews and Gentiles united for the glory of God. You, me and us, united for His glory. Your faith in Christ gives you instant access to God and His blessings.

Indeed, His blessing is that He has equipped you with the task of completing His will. You will have a greater sense of FREEDOM and CONFIDENT as you go about, acting on the convictions that He has placed into you heart. No longer should you wonder

what life's mystery is in store for you for He has revealed it in the unity of believers under Jesus Christ. Get along, Cypress Church!

How should you respond?

For those who are believers, God has spoken to you and has given you some names of people in your life that you need God's overflowing grace to pour upon. This is especially true if those people are here under the church. You need to follow these convictions because it is God's will that we are all united under Christ.

For those who do not know Jesus Christ, this is the time for you to accept Him into your life. You may think you have your life under control, but I'll bet that is not the case. I'll bet that in the recesses of your mind, you are thinking, "But if people only knew." Well, let me tell you that everyone here have similar thoughts. There is no one here that is adequate enough to stand before God and escape His Judgment; only Jesus Christ. So this is the time to give your life to Jesus Christ. Pray with me as I close.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for Your revelation of the mystery, that in Jesus Christ the church will unite and become the testimony of Your eternal purpose. Thank you for allowing us to participate in Your blessings. Give us now Lord, the strength to carry through on our convictions and remove our stumbling blocks that get in the way of our relationship with you. For some of us this is the first time that we come to You on our knees. We freely acknowledge that we are sinners incapable of standing before Your Holy presence. We accept Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was raised three days later in order that we may live. We pray for Your strength as we turn from our sins and walk in Your ways. In the Name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior today, will you please let me know? I would love to welcome you into the fellowship of believers.

Lastly, for those with any doubts about God's grace, His mystery revealed, or God's purpose, there's a story about Alaskan horses and the jackasses. You see, when confronted with danger, Alaskan horses will form a circle and face inward, exposing the power of their incredible back kick to the danger. The Alaskan jackasses, however, will face outward and kick themselves to death. Why can't we all just get along? We can by God's grace and you can decide this morning if you are the horse or the jackass.

Thank you.