

The Things That Make For Peace

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Galatians: Free At Last Series
Galatians 2:1-10

A number of years ago my family and I went on vacation. We were camping in a National Park in another state. Well, Sunday rolled around and we decided to go to church. I just hate to miss a week of gathering together with God's people to worship. So we found a little church that was near the National Park and on Sunday morning we went to church. The auditorium in the church had a round stage. Someone from the church told me that it was a converted dance hall. I thought, "That's great! They converted a dance hall into a church building." Well, Marlene and I were talking with each other before the service and suddenly we were hit with a sound that resembled a passing train because the choir began singing as the stage was moving and revolving. So we were hit with this Doppler Effect. But we enjoyed the choir.

And they introduced the pastor. The pastor began to preach and things were going along smoothly until the pastor started to criticize all the other churches in his community. His text had nothing to do with speaking about other churches in the community. In fact, there is no text like that in the Bible – here's how to criticize all the other churches in your local community. But as he began speaking about the faults of each of the other churches and their pastors, it was like blood in the water for sharks. People were jumping out of their seats saying, "Don't hold back! Preach it!"

He said, "I don't have to tell you about First Methodist Church. They're just a bunch of hypocrites down there. And Pastor Miller doesn't preach the Bible. You know those Presbyterians – the way they dress at that Presbyterian Church looks like they're going to a nightclub. The women are all painted up. They just appointed a divorced man to their Presbytery." He literally went through the list of churches in the town and proceeded to criticize every other church and every other pastor. It was one of the ugliest things I had ever heard from a pulpit.

The great tragedy was that it seemed to be part of the liturgy of this church. It didn't seem at all unusual to the folks in the church to hear this. After he got done criticizing everyone else, he went back to the text and then did an altar call.

Mark Twain once told a story about a scientific experiment in which scientists wanted to see how different animals got along. So he put a dog and a cat in a cage and observed them for a while. Initially, they were a little frightened of each other. But after a period of time, the dog and the cat just laid down together. They were snuggling and licking each other. Then he put in the cage a goat and a pig along with the dog and the cat. They sized each other up, but after a while, they were huddled together and became friends. And so the scientist said, "I wonder what would happen if I put into the cage a

Catholic, a Baptist and a Presbyterian along with the dog, the cat, the goat and the pig.” Mark Twain remarked that after an hour there was nothing living in the cage.

Thirty years ago Alvin Toffler, who was a pretty astute observer of global trends, wrote this:

The sudden shift of social ground-rules today, the smudging of roles, status distinctions, and lines of authority, the immersion in blip culture, and above all the breakup of the great thought systems, have shattered the world-image most of us carry around in our skulls. In consequence, most people surveying the world around them today see only chaos. They suffer a sense of personal powerlessness and pointlessness.

He went on to say this:

We live in a society that is fast fragmenting at the level of values and lifestyles. All the old integrated mechanisms are being challenged. We cry out for a totally new basis for unity. But we have by no means found this basis.

There is a feeling around the world of two opposite trends. On the one hand, the world is rushing together as we are more connected in the information age than we have ever been. Global marketing has homogenized the sale of product in movies and music around the globe. But at the same time, there is a feeling that things are falling apart; we're getting more fragmented.

We've got more than one hundred languages spoken in the Columbus Public Schools; one in ten homes in Franklin County doesn't speak English as their primary language. Central Ohio is predicted to grow to slightly over 2 million people in the next 15 years from about 1.7 million now. Half the growth is predicted to come from people born outside of the United States. Go to a local hospital nursery in Central Ohio and it looks like a mini-United Nations.

So, around the world people are being thrown together in ways that have rarely, if ever, occurred in all of human history. And there is a longing, a hunger, to figure out how we can live at peace with each other.

That was Jesus' prayer on the night before he went to the cross. He said in John 17:20-23:

John 17:20-23

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you... 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity...

Sadly, the one place on earth that people ought to see Jesus' prayer answered is in the Christian Church. We don't see this coming together the way we ought to see it. Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

“Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. is the most segregated hour in America.”

What he said 45 years ago is still largely true. Most churches are mono-ethnic, mono-cultural, mono-racial, mono-everything. You don't see a lot of diversity, a coming together of different people, in most churches.

And between churches relationships aren't what you might expect from followers of Jesus Christ. One researcher said that there are over 22,000 denominations in the world. In a small country like Chile, alone, it is reported that there are 5000 denominations and new denominations start every week.

Now, the message of unity, God creating a new people, runs through the book of Galatians. It hits its high point in Galatians 3:26-28:

Galatians 3:26-28

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

But today, we're going to anticipate that high point in Galatians 3 in a message that I've titled, "The Things That Make For Peace." I borrowed that phrase from something Jesus said as he wept over Jerusalem. He said:

If only you had known the things that make for peace.

Let's pray.

Galatians 2:1-10.

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. 4 This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. 6 As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. 7 On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. 8 For God, who was at work in

Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. 9 James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

The church divided

Let me give you some background to this text. We've been going through Galatians verse by verse. We're going to continue this week. The Apostle Paul had been planting churches throughout what would be called today South Central Turkey. Back then it was called Galatia. And these churches were mainly planted among non-Jewish folks; people coming from a pagan background.

Well, immediately after he left, some people came in who were apparently Jewish Christians. We don't know if they were real Christians with bad theology, or false Christians. Paul called them "false brothers." But immediately after the Apostle Paul left, these Jewish Christians came into these Gentile churches with a message that is reported in Acts 15:1 and verse 5:

Acts 15:1, 5

Certain individuals came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

In other words, they were saying to these baby Christians, "The person who taught you the Christian message didn't get it right. The Apostle Paul just gave you half a message. He told you a message about grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But he didn't tell you that in addition to faith in Christ, you men also need to be circumcised and all of you need to keep the Jewish laws of kashrut, the ritual food laws. And you need to keep the Sabbath. And if you don't do these things, you aren't going to be saved, or be a member of God's people."

Now, this message that they needed to add to Christ in order to be a member of the people of God was unsettling these baby Christians. These opponents of Paul also argued that Paul's message was different than the "real apostles" in Jerusalem. The real apostles, Peter, James and John, they claimed, agreed with what the false brothers said – the need for circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and food laws. Paul was the one who was going off on his own. He was departing from the true message. And besides, if there was any disagreement, the "real apostles" ought to win because Paul got his message from them and he garbled it along the way.

Now, the Apostle Paul is responding to all of this in the letter to the Galatians. He is fierce about his independence from the Apostles in Jerusalem. He says, “I didn’t get my gospel from them. I got it by revelation from God.”

Galatians 1:11-12

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

In other words, he said, “I am not handing out second-hand scraps. I am telling you, Galatians, what I heard from God!”

But Paul was deeply concerned that there might be a difference between him and the Jerusalem Apostles. And so he writes in Galatians 2:1-2:

Galatians 2:1-2

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.

And we begin to see in these two verses some of the things that make for peace. Here is a controversy. What’s the message that we will be preaching to the churches? How do you bring people together especially when there are these wedge people who are trying to divide folks? They are stirring things up – gossiping and blogging. How do you bring folks together when other people are working hard to separate them?

The Apostle Paul shows in these verses:

A passion for peace

When Paul writes in verse 2:

Galatians 2:2

...I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.

He was not concerned about getting the Jerusalem Apostles to approve his message, as if he needed their approval or their endorsement. He had already received endorsement from God. But his concern was that if the Jerusalem Apostles were teaching something other than grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone, that right at the beginning of the church we might have two very different Christianities: One that said Christ alone plus nothing - he is sufficient to make you a member of the people of God. And the other that said you need to believe in Christ, plus you need to become a traditional Jew in order to become a member of God’s people.

Paul feared that God's plan to bring people together from diverse backgrounds, God's plan to heal the fragmentation of the human race would be shattered from the beginning. Paul's passion for the unity of the church is not embraced in the contemporary church with our 22,000 denominations. Even in the local church, we so easily walk away from relationships with other Christians. "Well, we just don't get along." "We have different political perspectives." "We have different musical preferences." "We use different versions of the Bible." "We disagree with how a person should be baptized, so we couldn't possibly function together in any unified way." "I guess we'll just have to separate and form a new church."

Paul cares about unity. He understands that Christ shed his blood on the cross to bring people together. There is a basis for the coming of the world together and that is the blood of Jesus Christ. You remember there are two bars on the cross – one, the vertical bar that reminds us that Christ died to establish peace between us and God. But then there is the horizontal bar, a bar that is often forgotten by the church today. Christ died not just to reconcile us individually to God, but to bring about peace with each other. Broken relationships in the church ought to grieve us as much as they grieve God.

What are the things that make for peace? Along for caring about peace, being passionate about peace, what are the things that make for peace between Christians?

Peacemakers make peace

Galatians 2:1

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.

Why did Paul bring Barnabas along? Why was Barnabas such a great choice for a meeting in which people potentially would have explosively different viewpoints?

Barnabas enjoyed a warm relationship with both sides of the dispute. He had a great relationship with the Jerusalem Apostles, and, he enjoyed a great relationship with the Apostle Paul. Barnabas was a bridge person. Barnabas was a peacemaker.

You see, according to the book of Acts, Barnabas was a Jew, who was by birth a Levite from Cyprus. Apparently, he became a Christian in Jerusalem. Barnabas was someone the Apostles knew and trusted. He was a big financial supporter of the church in Jerusalem. And Barnabas was a huge fan of Paul and of Paul's work among the Gentiles. One more thing about Barnabas, his real name was actually Joseph. Barnabas was his nickname and it means "Son of Encouragement."

Barnabas had a gift of encouragement. Have you ever met someone who was a gifted encourager? You just feel good being around this person. They're always putting their arm around your shoulder, telling you what a great person you are; how you really make

a difference. They notice the little things you do that you think are no big deal. When you are around an encourager, you just feel good. You are feeling overwhelmed, but an encourager comes along and fills you with fresh faith in God. You don't think you are going to be able to succeed, but this encourager helps you believe in God's activity through your life. Do you know any encouragers?

You know, so many divisions could be healed just by bringing into the mix an encouraging peacemaker. When you are at odds with another person, and you don't have the resource not to prove them wrong, but to heal the relationship, and you know that God wants this relationship healed, bringing along a bridge person, someone who is not your advocate, but enjoys a warm relationship with the other person, a person who has credibility on both sides of the dispute, is so helpful.

Peacemaking is not just some specialist role for a very few Christians. It is supposed to be the calling of every Christian. Jesus' followers are supposed to orient our lives around making peace and spreading peace wherever we go. Christians are not supposed to be professional critics. Christians are not supposed to be constant fault-finders. Christians are not supposed to be mean. We're not supposed to sound like we're always on the war path.

Here's how Christians are described in 1 Peter 3:11:

1 Peter 3:11

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Here is how followers of Jesus are described in Hebrews 12:14:

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Does this sound like you? Or how about this in Romans 12:18:

Romans 12:18

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Again, does this sound like you? You are a follower of Jesus. Are you trying to live at peace with everyone?

Followers of Christ are people who look for ways to bring people together instead of finding ways to divide people. Followers of Christ are not demagogues. We don't simply rub other people's resentments. We don't hold up straw men and knock them down. Followers of Christ are people, that when we see a fire, we try to pour water on the fire. If you are the kind of person that when there is a little fire, a little controversy, when people are at odds, you pour gasoline on the fire. You love to separate people. You love it when people are at odds, then you might ask yourself whether the Spirit of

Christ really is living in your heart because Christ is a reconciler – a healer of relationships.

And you know there are some people who have oriented their lives around making peace. They are passionate about this. And they are also skilled in finding those people, employing them in family situations, in marital situations, on leadership teams. Those Barnabases are invaluable in spreading the peace of Christ.

What are the things that make for peace?

Concrete cases make peace

Galatians 2:1-3

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

Paul not only brought Barnabas along, but he also brought Titus with him. Why Titus?

Titus was a Gentile; not only a Gentile, but he was an uncircumcised Gentile, who had come to Christ perhaps through Paul's ministry, we don't know. Bringing Titus along could be seen as deliberately provocative. It could be seen as the opposite of having a peacemaking desire. Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem could have felt, "Paul, you are deliberately shoving this uncircumcised Gentile in our face. We've got this nice little homogenous Christian group here and you are disturbing our peace. You are messing things up."

What Paul did could be compared to a segregated church in the 1960's where a white daughter of one of the elders of the church deliberately walks down the aisle of the church hand-in-hand with her African-American boyfriend. People in the church would react, "You are deliberately trying to destroy our way of life. You are spitting on our traditions. You are offending our sensibilities."

Next week we are going to talk about the need at times for what I would call "creative provocation." There are times when to bring about healthy peace, we have to deliberately create tension in a system. There are times where we have to upset the status quo and make a mess in order to bring about healthy peace. There are times when healthy peace can only come about if we shake things up and bring the sickness of a dysfunctional system to the surface, lance the boil, if you will. Sometimes being an agitator is really the first step for healthy peace. It is not always making nice. We'll talk about this next week.

But I want to make a simpler point this week. In so many disputes, we just talk past each other. We get into it with another person and we're arguing about concepts; we're fighting about ideas; we're discussing things in the abstract. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to think negative things about a person? And even pass negative comments about an individual or a group when that person is not present? We say things in someone's absence that we would never say, if they walked into the room. We could have a million opinions, but when that person is there, we would never say it to their face.

And so the Jewish-Christians in Jerusalem may have had a prejudice against Gentile Christians and they may have voiced those prejudices among themselves. Paul presents them with a concrete example of an uncircumcised Gentile, who loved and served Jesus every bit as much as they did. Now, what are you going to do about it?

I've watched this at work in so many situations. The teenage fundamentalist is taught in his high school group that this church does things the true way, the right way. Then he goes off to college and he starts meeting Christians from very different backgrounds, who have very different approaches than his old church: Christians who speak in tongues, Christians who wear jeans to church, Christians who may have an occasional beer, Christians who don't use the King James version of the Bible.

But something happens to the fundamentalist. He actually likes these people. He sees Christ in them. He notices that they worship Jesus with their whole hearts. They share their faith in a warm way. They love God's Word.

Now, we have a problem. This real person is breaking down my prejudices.

Friends, have you seen this at work in your own life? We are all raised with prejudices. Generalizing about a group, globalize off of one instance with a member of a particular religion, a particular church, a particular ethnic group. And we can hold onto those prejudices and argue why they make sense, until we have a concrete counter-example.

You have certain perspectives regarding Muslims and then a Christian in the church invites you to a dinner hosted by his Moroccan-Muslim friend and you discover that they are the warmest, most hospitable, kindest people you've ever met.

I find that prejudice always breaks down not by arguing about bloodless abstractions, people pooling their mutual ignorance together. Rather, prejudice breaks down as you allow yourself to become friends with, be blessed by, and listen to a real person from the group that you have such a hard time with.

The foundation for peace

Galatians 2:3-5

Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. 4 This matter arose because some false believers had

infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Let me tell you a story that I heard years ago from Pastor Tony Evans. He said he woke up one morning and noticed that his bedroom wall was cracked. And so he decided to be a real man and got some spackle out. He spackled over the crack, sanded it and painted it. I would have called Marlene and said, “Marlene, we have a crack. You need to do something.”

But Tony Evans was a real man and he spackled and painted the crack. He felt proud of his work. But a few days later there were four more cracks in his bedroom wall. So he got more spackle out and he spackled over those cracks and painted. He said a few days later the cracks came back with all of their aunts and uncles and cousins. The whole wall was cracked. This time he thought, “This is beyond me. I’m going to get a contractor in.”

The contractor looked at the wall and then left the room. He went outside and walked around the house. He came back in. Tony Evans said, “What’s it going to cost to fix this wall?”

The contractor said, “\$10,000.”

Pastor Evans said, “\$10,000? Just to spackle my wall and paint it?”

The contractor said, “No, no! That will be \$500. It will cost \$9,500 to fix your foundation. The problem with your wall is your foundation is settling. Just spackling the wall won’t help. You’ll just have the cracks come back again.”

There are times, friends, when there are matters so foundational that we can’t just take out our spackle and spackle them over saying, “Now everything is just fine. Now we’ll have peace.” Sometimes you cannot patch up a relationship until the foundation is repaired.

If you are a victim of domestic violence, you can’t heal your relationship with your spouse with a little spackle and paint. Going out on a date night, taking a little get-away trip, getting a gift from your spouse, making love – that is not going to heal the violence in your home. You’ve got a problem at the foundation. And until that foundation is repaired, you are going to have the same angry cracks coming back with their aunts, uncles and cousins.

If you are living with an addict, you can’t fix that with a little spackle and paint or a promise by the addict, “I’m going to change. Sure I abuse prescription drugs and I’ve been abusing them for months and years. Or I abuse alcohol or pornography or I’m visiting prostitutes, or I’m having affairs. But all of that is now done. I promise to change after one visit to a counselor or a New Year’s resolution.” A week of not doing it

– that’s just spackle and paint. If you are living with an addict, you have a foundation problem. And without long-term recovery, something that repairs the foundation of this person’s life, you are just going to have the same cracks back in your family. They are going to come back with their aunts, uncles and cousins.

For the Apostle Paul, the foundation for peace was the gospel.

Galatians 2:5

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Paul says, “I am not budging an inch on the gospel. I can flex on so many things – what you eat or don’t eat, what day of the week you worship on. But if you mess up on the gospel – grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone – then you are going to have a temporary peace and all the cracks are going to come back after a few days or a few weeks with their aunts, uncles and cousins.”

Why is a firm grasp of the gospel, the message of faith alone in Christ alone, the only foundation for peace?

Loss of spiritual peace

Back in the 18th century there was a famous English evangelist and preacher named George Whitefield. He preached a powerful sermon called, “The Method of Grace.” And his text was Jeremiah 6:14:

Jeremiah 6:14

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.

He was essentially preaching about how we simply spackle over cracks instead of repairing the foundation of our lives. We heal people lightly and offer peace when there really isn’t any peace or foundation for peace. And Whitefield says in this sermon that to find real peace with God, you have to not only repent of your sins, the actual sins that you commit – your anger, your lust, your greed, your gossip, your stealing, your lies. Whitefield says that peace not only comes from repenting of your sins, but that you also need to repent of your self-righteousness, your reliance on anything in your life – any activity, any performance of good deeds, any prayers, any devotions. Before you can find peace with Christ, Whitefield says that you not only have to repent of your sins, you have to repent of your righteousness and come to the place where you can say with the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 64:6

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...

All my prayers, all my good deeds, all my giving to the church, all my attempts at encouraging words, all of this is like filthy menstrual cloths that women in the past used to use to soak up their periods. “Filthy rags.”

When Adam sinned against God and hid in the Garden with his wife, he and his wife, Eve, they made clothes out of fig leaves to hide their nakedness from each other and from God. That’s what we do when we try to establish our own sense of goodness before God. We are like Adam and Eve sewing fig leaves together to hide our sin and our nakedness. Our righteous deeds never provide us with any peace.

I talk with folks all the time who say, “Rich, I don’t know what to do. I’ve accepted Christ into my heart and I’m really trying to live the Christian life. I’m doing everything I can to get rid of my sins. But I still don’t have any peace. I’ve gone to counseling, but it doesn’t help.”

So often, friend, I tell you that you are just putting spackle on the wall. The problem is at the foundational level. It is not enough to repent of your sins. You also have to repent on relying on anything in you and come to God naked relying only on Christ and always just on Christ. Christ alone plus nothing. And let Christ clothe you. Let Christ affirm you. Allow what Christ says about you to penetrate your heart. Instead of trying to feel good about yourself with your spackle and paint, build your life on the foundation of Christ.

It is not only a loss of spiritual peace when we get the foundation of the gospel wrong, but there is a loss of psychological peace.

Loss of psychological peace

We don’t care anything about circumcision these days. We do it purely as a health concern, an issue of preference. But this message of Christ plus something always brings people into bondage and will cause you to lose your peace – psychologically, emotionally, you lose peace.

So, if you say, “In order for me to have peace, I require Christ plus having my children do really well,” you’ll never have peace because your kids will go up and down and form new cracks in the wall.

If you say, “Well, I need Christ and financial security,” you will never have peace because your finances will go up and down.

“I need Christ and my husband to be more sensitive, or be more romantic, or take account of my feelings...” Christ plus anything will cause you to lose your emotional peace.

What are the things that make for peace?

Your way is insufficient for peace

Galatians 2:7-9

On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. 8 For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. 9 James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

Peace comes about often when we recognize that just because someone is different than me, or different than you, doesn't make them wrong. The Apostles got together and they rallied around not different gospels. They had one gospel, the gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the full and final basis for our salvation. They didn't create two different gospels, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. But they had two different strategies, two different mission fields – a mission field for the Jews that would be led by the Apostle Peter; and, a mission field for the Gentiles that would be led by the Apostle Paul.

We recognize that there has to be differences in approaches, differences in strategies, differences in gifts as we minister to different people. Cultures are all different. I read a piece by a cultural anthropologist named Paul Hiebert. He said in his piece that Americans love platforms. We have platforms everywhere in our homes. Things to raise ourselves off the floor. We have platforms that we sit on called chairs that fit us underneath another platform called a table that we eat at. And we have a platform called a bed and platforms called couches. We Americans love platforms.

We have a fundamental conviction that floors are dirty. Even after you wash the floor, if your child drops something on the floor and then picks it up and puts it in their mouths, we say, "Don't eat that! That's dirty."

Japanese homes are not filled with platforms. Japanese people take their shoes off and leave them at the doors. They wash their floors and then they sit on a little mat on the floor.

Which way is right?

You see Americans at an airport at 3:00 a.m. in the morning uncomfortably slouching in a chair because we would never be as undignified as to sit on the floor. And then there are all the internationals with a coat under their heads fast asleep on the floor.

Which way is right?

I read a story of an American professor who was talking to a Hindu professor, who said to him with some level of condescension, "Is it true that you Indians eat with your

hands?” Of course, we Americans eat with our hands. We eat carrot sticks, or cookies with our hands. But we would never eat mashed potatoes with our hands. The Indian man said, “Well, yes. But my hands are washed and they’ve only been in my mouth.” And then he said to the American professor, “Is it true that you put a fork in your mouth that has been in the mouths of other people, even in a restaurant where you don’t know how it has been washed?”

Which way is right?

The foundation is the gospel. But what we build on the foundation, our music preferences, the clothes we like to wear to church, the songs we like to sing, the way we like to do communion, the way we organize the church – we can’t have peace until you and I approach our particular preferences with humility saying, “My way is not the only way.” So long as we both have embraced the gospel, so long as we both have trusted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone, so long as we both have received the Spirit of God in our lives, we are brothers and sisters. And it doesn’t matter if you wear something on your head or don’t, or take communion every week, or use one cup or 7000 plastic cups. Can we see God at work in that other church, in that other Christian, just as he is at work in our church?

Galatians 2:8

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.

Last thought. What are the things that make for peace?

Giving to the poor makes peace

Galatians 2:10

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

There was a famine that took place in Jerusalem. And many Jews who had come to Christ were economically discriminated against by Jews who rejected Jesus. They may have been fired from their jobs. They may have been subject to economic boycotts. Jews who had come to Jesus may have found themselves hundreds, or even thousands of miles away from their homeland as they chose to settle in Jerusalem near the mother church to receive fellowship and teaching.

But there were a lot of poor Jewish believers in Christ in and around Jerusalem. And so the Jerusalem Apostles said, “Paul, we can work together, but as you go out and minister to the Gentile world, don’t forget us here in Jerusalem. Remember your poor brothers here in Jerusalem.”

Paul said that he was thrilled with the opportunity to have his Gentile mission churches give financially back to the Jewish mother church. Why was he so eager to collect

money from the Gentiles and give it to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem? Why does the issue of this collection for the needy in Jerusalem show up over and over again in Paul's writings? If you are taking notes, you may just want to jot down 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and Romans 15:25-28.

The issue was bigger than just helping brothers in need which is certainly motive enough. But Paul saw this giving of finances as a major way to strengthen the unity of Jewish and Gentile churches. Financial giving is a way that we heal this fragmented world. You see, the Gentiles knew that lots of members of the Jerusalem church looked with suspicion on them. "Look at those people out there, those uncircumcised folks, worshiping God with their strange customs. Why don't they eat food the way we eat it? Why do they sing the songs they sing?" Paul knew that a collection from the Gentiles would move the Jerusalem churches towards unity and brotherly affection with the Gentiles.

Along with millions of other people around the world last week, Vineyard Columbus helped to bring a little healing to the broken nation of Haiti by taking a collection for Disaster Relief. You gave \$146,854. We have a medical team that is down there now working in a field hospital set up by the University of Miami. They arrived last Saturday and they will be there for another week. We'll send multiple medical teams down, we hope, and multiple work teams.

Giving, especially to the poor, breaks down dividing walls. Last Palm Sunday we had an offering to help members of this church and members in the community with the effects of the recession. I said to you then, "We are our brothers' keeper. If you are doing well, if you have a job in this recession, give to someone who doesn't have a job." And you gave \$625,000 dollars.

God is passionate about the healing of our divisions. And one of the major ways that walls come down between people is through financial giving to the poor. Let's pray.

The Things That Make For Peace

Rich Nathan
January 30-31, 2010
Galatians: Free At Last Series
Galatians 2:1-10

- I. The church divided
- II. A passion for peace (Galatians 2:1, 2)
- III. Peacemakers make peace (Galatians 2:1)
- IV. Concrete cases make peace (Galatians 2:1, 3)
- V. The foundation for peace (Galatians 2:3-5)
 - A. Loss of spiritual peace
 - B. Loss of psychological peace
- VI. Your way is insufficient for peace (Galatians 2:7-9)
- VII. Giving to the poor makes peace (Galatians 2:10)