

One Church, One Faith, One Lord

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[0 : 00] All right then, Galatians chapter 3, and you'll have to have your Bibles open or we'll never get anywhere. One Church, One Faith, One Lord. That's the title tonight and it's very appropriate for an evening when we're admitting new people into membership of this fellowship.

Worship. When you read the story of the history of the people of God throughout the scriptures of the Old Testament, you'll see that the great fundamental problem always comes back to just one thing.

Idolatry. That is, seeking other gods to worship instead of the one true God or alongside, in addition to the one true God, the God of Israel.

Now, that's why the Ten Commandments begin at the very beginning with the first commandment. I am the Lord your God. You will have no other gods before me.

And the second commandment, you will have no idols. Why was idolatry such a problem? Well, because idolatry is the very essence of what sin is.

[1 : 14] Behind all idolatry is the one true idolatry, the idolatry of the self. We worship ourselves as truly being the rulers on the thrones of our life.

Here's a quotation from my father. This is why it is not possible for a natural man to worship God in any true meaning of the term. Until a man is converted, which means that his proud ego is broken and he takes his proper place in relation to God, he remains at the center of his world and even God himself is kept on the circumference.

For God to have his rightful place means that we also must take our rightful place. But you see, we find it so very hard, don't we, to take our rightful place.

Even when we are Christian, the terrible power of pride and self-assertion is only too evident, isn't it, in our hearts. John Calvin put it this way, Man's nature, he says, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols.

And so constantly, because of that, we, as human beings, lose perspective on the real story of eternity. We become confused in our thinking about what God is really doing and what our place in what God is doing really is.

[2 : 39] We lose the big picture. We lose the big story. And that leads us to lose the plot completely about our own lives as well. I came across this week the story of somebody called Huru Onada.

He was a Japanese soldier who was parachuted with a bunch of others into the Philippine island of Lube in 1944 with the mission of remaining there until the Japanese invaded. They were told never to surrender and never to take their own lives.

But of course, the war ended in 1945. And after that time, the island was taken by the Allies. There was peace. But despite every effort made, dropping leaflets, sending messengers, doing everything that was possible, this band of men never could really believe that the war had actually ended.

And one by one, they died off, or one by one, occasionally they came out. But this man, Huru Onada, stayed there until 1972, for nearly 30 years, believing he was still fighting a war.

You see, the reason he did that was because he totally failed to see the bigger picture. He failed to see that something so much bigger than his own little personal experience could be happening, that he got totally confused about what his place in the world was.

[3 : 57] He was left in bondage. You see, that's exactly what we do so often. We forget the bigness, the greatness of the eternal God, of his great eternal plan and purpose.

And we forget the smallness of ourselves in our tiny place in God's plan. And as God gets smaller in our thinking, and as we get bigger and bigger, our thinking just becomes hopelessly confused.

We begin to think that God somehow can't do without our help. That we have some special contribution to make in helping his plan to go on and progress.

And what becomes vitally important in our thinking becomes our story and our place, and our way of doing things for God and what we can do for him. As though somehow he was serving us, not us serving him.

As though somehow we were really at the centre of the world, and God actually was at the periphery, his business being to sort us out. And that's why in the history of the Christian church there has been so much division and strife.

[5 : 10] Because we are all, even as Christians by nature, idolaters. And we constantly insist, don't we, on adding our other saviours, our other lords, to the one true Lord of the church, Jesus Christ.

And these things actually become in practice the real things that we're worshipping. Becomes the things to do with our particular denomination. Or our particular congregational tradition.

Or our special emphasis. Or whatever it is. And whereas each and any of these things, in their place and time, may indeed be great and very fruitful servants of the gospel.

So often, because idolatry is so deep in our hearts, the means become an end in themselves. And we really start worshipping them more than we worship God himself.

And that's idolatry. And there's no more dangerous or seductive idolatry than that of things which in themselves and in their right place are not inherently evil, but are in fact good and true and right and proper.

[6 : 19] Things given by God for the blessing of his people and for the purposes of his grace. But when these things usurp the place of God himself, they are the most terrible and awful and wayward leading forms of sheer idolatry.

Take the gift of sex, for example. One of God's highest and most beautiful and most wonderful gifts in his service. Yet isn't it true that in our society it's become one of man's greatest idols?

We're a society that lives in worship of sex. Or by the same token, spiritual privilege. When used as God intends, it's a glorious thing in his service.

But when it's abused, when it's nurtured with pride, it can become utterly destructive, can't it? And that's exactly the issue that Paul is addressing here in Galatians chapter 3.

He's addressing the whole issue of a people, Israel, whom God had gifted with a wonderful calling, a unique, special privilege in his service for the sake of the gospel. But who had become totally confused about it, so that it became to them nothing more than idolatry.

[7 : 37] And the gospel of these Jewish missionaries that Paul is confronting here in Galatia was just like the gospel of so many people today. It was a gospel with a God who was far, far too small.

It was really something that had become a man-centered gospel, not a God-centered gospel. A gospel for us and about us, where we're at the center. How we are blessed, how we are helped, how we are fulfilled in this life and the next.

Not a gospel about God, about his purpose, about his eternal purpose for his own glory. And that's why Galatians, as a book, is so relevant today to us.

Paul is doing here what the church today so badly needs. He's bringing about a Copernican revolution in their thinking about the place of God and the place of man.

Just as you've got to have the sun at the center of the solar system if you're ever going to understand anything about astronomy and how the universe works. So you've got to have God at the center of his gospel and his purpose.

[8 : 49] You'll never understand anything about how he works, about the church, or about the world. And Paul tells these Judaizing missionaries here, he tells them very straight.

He says to them, you and your cherished Israelite tradition, it's not at the center of the world. You're not the sole subject of God's attention.

You're not. The gospel's not just about you. That's what he's saying to them. It's about God. And you better learn that. And God is doing something far, far greater than you could ever think.

He's remaking the whole universe. He's bringing about a new creation, as we were speaking about this morning. And he's bringing up people from all of creation, for that new creation.

And your part, as the Jewish people of God, your part was to serve that purpose. It was to be a means to that end. Not an end in itself.

[9 : 49] So you've got to get things straight, or else you'll find out that you're not actually serving God at all, but you're against him. And that was a bitter pill for Jews to swallow, even for Christian Jews, believers in Jesus Christ, to discover that no longer was the role that they had cherished, so specially as the Israel of God, no longer was that only for them.

But they had to see it. They had to see that God's plan and purpose is far, far bigger than any individual nation, or any church, any denomination, any congregation, any one person. They had to see what we've all got to see. We've got to be humble, see our place in the great overarching purpose of God. And friends, that has a real message for us today, doesn't it? Because we so often think about the church in the Western world as being the place of God's privilege, certainly for the last 2,000 years, and certainly even more for the last 500 years, we have been, haven't we?

In many ways, playing a unique role in God's plan and purpose. It's been the source of mission to all the rest of the world. We've been flooded with the privileges, of the scriptures, of theology, of so much in the history and the heritage of our land and of our nation.

[11:13] But the gospel is not just about the church in Scotland, or Britain, or Europe, or the West. And we don't have any privilege status that is inviolable.

And if we've outlived our purpose because of sin and rejection of the yoke of Jesus Christ, God will move on and use others. If he did that to Israel because they rejected him, how much war will he do that to a piddling little nation like Scotland?

Or a piddling little effort like the Church of Scotland? Just because God has blessed this nation through the national church for decades, for hundreds of years, that doesn't mean that we have an inviolable place.

And so it's important for all of us, for all national pride, for all idolatry, for all things like that, it's important for us to see that the gospel is all about God.

And we have our place in that, not he in our lives. And he is unchanging, and his unstoppable plan is to glorify his son, and he will do it.

[12:25] And if we are out of step with that, we better watch ourselves. And here in chapter 3, verses 15 to 29, Paul is showing how these two things relate, with special reference to the specific role and calling of Israel, and the law that distinguished Israel from all the other peoples of the earth, as a servant in the history of God's eternal plan.

And he distinguishes two things that the Jewish Christians and the Judaizing missionaries just couldn't seem to distinguish. First of all, the permanence of God's promise, his one eternal purpose and goal and redemption, unchanging, unchangeable.

But secondly, the parenthesis of God's law, as just part of his ongoing temporal progression of that promise in history.

His big picture was permanent, eternal, but Israel's specific role was a historical one. And indeed, it was a parenthesis.

And only when you see clearly the big picture, the unchanging one plan of God from the start, one new creation, with one new humanity from every tribe and people and nation, only when we see that as God's one immutable single goal, can you begin to understand the place that Israel played as a nation defined by Moses and his law in serving that purpose for a time, but only for a time.

[14:04] Now, it's a complex argument. There's too much for us to cover all this tonight and it's not easy in parts and we'll do our best. But what we're going to do tonight is focus on what God's gospel is all about.

In other words, the permanence of the one promise of God, the one goal, which is accomplished in Christ alone. And that's especially verses 15 to 18 and verses 26 to 29.

And next time, we're going to focus on how God brought that goal to a climax in Christ and that is the parenthesis of the law, the part that the historical nation of Israel played as a means to that end. And indeed, it is a parenthesis in Paul's argument here also in verses 19 to 25. So let's look then at verses 15 to 18 first. And Paul's first emphasis there is our first heading, One Gospel Faith.

He's continuing the same argument of verses 1 to 14. It's not a new one. But he's driving home the implication of what he said there. They have a complete New Testament Christian experience.

[15:14] The Gentiles, just like the Jews, just like the apostles, had received the Holy Spirit, proving that they were justified by Christ. That was entirely consistent with Abraham's faith, with the faith of the whole Old Testament.

Always by faith, never by works. And as I said there, experience was the climax. The promise of the Holy Spirit poured out at last. The New Age, the latter days, what the prophets had longed for.

And now, says Paul, this proves that from the very, very start of God's plan, right to the very end, there has only ever been one Gospel Faith.

One plan of salvation, all by God's promise. One way of salvation, all by faith in God's promise, and that alone. And that's very important.

Very important to grasp that, not just for the Jewish Christians of Paul's day and for the Galatians, but for today also. There are people who often want to drive a wedge between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

[16:23] As though salvation was somehow different for the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God. Or as though the Gospel was only for this age, for the Gentiles now, and somehow by some mysterious other way, God is going to save the Jews by a different method.

No, says Paul, there's only ever been one faith. The faith of Abraham is the faith of Christ. There is one Gospel Faith.

Do you remember back in chapter 1, verse 8 and 9, he said there is one Gospel. Any other Gospel is no Gospel at all. It doesn't matter who preaches it, even if it's an angel from heaven. One Gospel, start to finish.

Notice in chapter 3 the various terms that Paul uses for this one Gospel. In verse 8, he calls it the Gospel preached in advance to Abraham. In verse 14, he calls it the blessing of Abraham that he was promised.

In verse 15 here, he calls it the covenant. And again in verse 17, the covenant that God gives, which is unchanging. Verses 16 to 29 that we're looking at here, the most common term he uses is the promise, the one promise.

[17:39] And it's the one promise that leads, verse 18, to the inheritance. And there's only ever been one Gospel, one covenant, one promise, one blessing, one inheritance, one way of salvation, and only one from the very beginning to the very end.

And so there's no divide whatsoever between the Old and the New Testaments. It's really only one Testament, one great Gospel promise from beginning to end. And that means, of course, that when we're preaching in the Old Testament, we're preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, just the same as if we're preaching John 3.16.

People get very confused about that at times. It's so important to see. That's what Paul's saying here. And now in these verses, Paul simply emphasizes this point that this one Gospel promise is inviolable, it's immutable, it's unchangeable.

Look at verse 15. Everybody knows, he says, that even a human covenant is binding. Well, how much more then is a covenant that God makes utterly binding?

A promise is a promise is a promise. That's what he's saying. We all know that, don't we? If you've got kids. Oh, Dad, you promised! And so even if it's pouring with rain and freezing cold, you still have to go to the beach because you promise.

[18:59] Because a promise is a promise. If you give somebody a bank note, what you're giving is giving them a promise. It's a bit of paper that says on it, I promise to pay the bearer on demand ten pounds.

It's a promise. If you've got the note, you've got the gold. If you make a business deal, if you make a contract, that's why you do it. It's binding. So nobody can wriggle out one way or the other.

And that's what Paul's saying here. God makes a covenant. God makes a promise. It's a promise. And therefore, whatever the law of Moses does do, we're going to look at that in detail next week, what it does not do is absolutely crystal clear.

Verse 15, it does not annul the promise. It's not a substitute way of salvation. It doesn't add to the promise. It's not a supplement to salvation by faith.

As far as salvation is concerned, not even temporarily does it make any substitute or any supplement to the one way of salvation that comes from God alone by his promise alone.

[20:13] You got it? One gospel for Abraham, for Israel in the time of Moses, for the Galatians, for us by faith alone.

And he further hammers home that point again by making two more factors very plain about the priority and the permanence of the promise. Look at verse 17. The promise has priority because of precedence.

The Mosaic Law is only given 430 years later. Now, you might try and argue that a will could be altered while the testator is still alive, but not after 430 years.

No. Moses' Law can't possibly annul something that God has rooted in history and said it's a promise and it stands.

It has priority because of precedence. But in verse 16 he shows that it has priority also because of posterity. The promise, he says, is made not just to Abraham but also to his seed.

[21 : 21] Now, we need to come back to that because it's very difficult. But the point is abundantly clear, isn't it? The promise is given also directly to Abraham's posterity long, long after even Moses.

So, clearly the promise hasn't been superseded because it's given directly to those people hundreds of years later or that one seed. So, you see, verse 17 is absolutely clear, the conclusion. The promise is inviolable. Nothing can make the promise void. Not even Moses can make the promise of God void. And therefore, verse 18, the promised inheritance, that is, the Holy Spirit that he's spoken about in verse 14, the fullness of intimacy with God himself, that great, wonderful thing that all the fathers look forward to, it cannot come by the law of Moses.

Because if it did, he says, the promise would be void. But it cannot be voided. And God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

The word gave it there especially emphasizes it. Literally the word gave it by grace and by implication, because the promise was given not just to Abraham, but to his seed.

[22 : 44] It comes to Abraham's seed by promise and is received by faith alone with no substitutes, with no supplements. So there's only one gospel, not two.

There's only one way of salvation, not two. There's only one faith, there only ever has been, not two. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, whether you're Abraham or his seed, the promised inheritance, the deepest, fullest intimacy with God through his Holy Spirit comes by faith in Christ alone.

No substitutes, no supplements. Now why is Paul emphasizing that? Why am I emphasizing that? Well, because simply this.

it means that if you have Christ, you have it all. You need no supplements. There are no supplements. No burdens can be put on you by yourself or by anybody else to seek something greater, to be truly in with the Lord Jesus and under his fullest blessing.

If you are accepted in Christ, you have the full inheritance, you have the full intimacy. There is no higher to go. your identity is totally secure.

[24 : 02] It doesn't need any supplement from you. Friends, you need to know that. If you don't grasp that, you will be in your Christian walk of discipleship, striving to perform, seeking God's approval and trying to show that because of how you've lived so faithfully this week, you've got more intimate with God.

And if you live like that, your thinking will go one of only two ways. Either you will become proud and puffed up because you're pleased with yourself and you think you've been doing well, you think you've earned God's approval, or else, perhaps more likely, you'll be cast down into despair because you will know that again and again and again and again you have fallen short and you cannot claim that intimacy that is for those who are specially in with God by their performance. And you see, that's idolatry, isn't it? That's trusting in another saviour to get you right in with God. That's trusting in yourself. That's saying, as Paul says here in chapter 2, verse 21, that's saying, Christ died for nothing.

Actually, what's really important is me. That annuls the promise. Do you see? That's Paul's point. But you see, if you grasp this truth, if you grasp that it's all by one gospel from God to you by grace, that you've received it all by his promise, well, that is the bedrock of security in your life.

That both humbles you because you realize that it's all come from God, utterly, utterly, without any deserving on your part, but at the same time, that liberates you.

[25 : 53] You're full of joy, you can rejoice, because you do have it all. You've got it all. You're intimate, the most intimate, with God the Father through Jesus Christ.

And grasping this one gospel faith, which is all by God's gracious gift, that is true worship. And that is the only true worship of God, because it recognizes that there are no other saviors, no other lords, nowhere else to go, only the one gospel of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ.

There is one gospel, only ever has been, one faith. And that implies that secondly, there only ever has been in view one church, one united people of faith, not two.

And that brings us to this difficult question of verse 16. Who is this seed, this offspring, which is Christ? The promise is given to Abraham and his seed.

Literally it says, not seeds, as though to many, but and to your seed, as though to one, which is Christ. The NIV has a very unfortunate translation here.

[27 : 13] It says, not one person, meaning, or many people. That words aren't there and I think it's an unhelpful translation. But whatever way we look at it here, it's a difficult verse, isn't it?

The problem seems to be that Paul is misusing scripture. It looks a very odd way of using these words, seed and seeds. I mean, if I said to you, I am a farmer and I have sheep, you wouldn't assume that I'm talking about just one sheep.

You wouldn't expect me to say, sheeps, I have lots of sheeps. And it's the same with this word seed, isn't it? Or offspring. If I was to say to you, I have offspring, you wouldn't assume that I was speaking about just one.

And it rather seems that that's what Paul's saying here. It's made even more difficult when we understand that every single Old Testament passage that he could be referring to here in Genesis, clearly, is not talking about seed or offspring in the singular, but in the plural.

plural. So we have to be honest and confront the problem. Is Paul using some kind of dodgy exegesis here? Well, some scholars would say simply, yes, he is.

[28 : 22] He's probably doing it because the opponents were doing that sort of thing. That was a rabbinic, Jewish way of arguing. And Paul's just beating them at their own game. In other words, Paul was wrong to do it.

He shouldn't have argued like that. Other people will say, well, yes, he can. because he's an apostle and he can do things like that, but we can't.

We could never treat scripture like that, but of course Paul could because he was an apostle. But that doesn't help us much either because if we can't trust the apostles' use of the Old Testament, how are we possibly supposed to learn how to use it ourselves?

My help on this come from one source and that is from Dr. Palmer Robertson. And I owe him a very great deal in understanding this passage. And he helped me to understand it through one of his lectures because he did what none of the other commentaries really did and that was go back right to basics.

He taught us to take the context very seriously. Both the Old Testament context that Paul quotes from and the context in the Galatian letter itself.

[29 : 29] Remember, what is the key issue in Paul's argument? It is this. There is only one way to the full experience of salvation, not two.

Not one superior way of salvation through faith in Christ plus the addition of the law and becoming Jewish and another inferior way for Gentiles who haven't yet submitted to circumcision and other aspects of the Jewish law.

No, there is only one way. And the key question for Paul that he is trying to make the Gentile Christians in Galatia see is this. Who are the true seed of Abraham?

Who truly stand in the great line of the people of God? To whom were these great wonderful promises made? These promises of the climax of intimacy with God through the Spirit in these great day of fulfillment?

Who were these promises really made to? Is it just to Israel according to the flesh? flesh? That is, those who have believed in Christ but also become Jewish and become related to Abraham through the flesh?

[30 : 39] If that's true then it must be that you have to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law to be fully intimate with God and his people. Is it to them? Or is the promise actually for all the spiritual seed of Abraham by faith alone without anything else?

That's the question that Paul is addressing. It's not a question of how many seeds Abraham would have in terms of numbers, one against many. Rather it's a question of the form of Abraham's seed in terms of identity.

What kind of seed and how many kinds of offspring is Abraham going to have? Is it a uniform seed? Is it one single seed by faith alone?

Or is it a plural form seed? Is it by faith and by works of the flesh, by circumcision and other things? That's the question that Paul is addressing.

The Old Testament context that he quotes from in Genesis helps us to see what contrast is being made in that original context. I think we should turn back there and maybe you'll turn with me to Genesis chapter 12 and some of the places that Paul is referring to.

[31 : 57] Look at Genesis chapter 12 and verse 6 and 7. Abraham passed through the land to the place at Shechem to the oak of Morah.

At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to your offspring I will give this land.

The point there is not to the Canaanites who have the land by flesh by their own works by their own inheritance but to your offspring by promise.

Look on to chapter 13 verse 14. The Lord said to Abraham after Lot had separated from him and Lot had chosen his part of the land.

God says lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are northward and southward and eastward and westward for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth.

[33 : 00] So that if one can count the dust of the earth your offspring also can be counted. Now quite clearly there his offspring are numerous but the point he's making is the land will be not Lot's offspring by his choice but to your offspring by the promise of God.

Turn on to Genesis chapter 17 verse 18. Abraham said to God oh that Ishmael might live before you.

God said no but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac and I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

The point again not about singular and plural but about not Ishmael and his offspring according to the flesh but through Isaac by promise.

Once again chapter 21 verse 9 again it's Abraham and Isaac and Ishmael Sarah saw Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian whom she had borne to Abraham laughing mocking so she said to Abraham cast out this slave woman with her son for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac and the thing was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son but God said to Abraham be not displeased because of the boy because of your slave woman whatever Sarah says to you do as she tells you for through Isaac shall your offspring be named once again the point not through Ishmael's seed but through Isaac's and in all of these contrasts the contrast is not between a singular and a plural in number but rather between a singular and plural in terms of the form of the offspring the promise line is one way and one way alone by promise not by promise and works of the flesh what

[35 : 10] Abraham can do what anyone can do on their own come back then to Galatians and see how exactly the same contrast is being made by Paul just look to chapter 4 first of all verse 22 it's especially clear for it is written that Abraham had two sons one by a slave woman and one by a free woman but the son of the slave was born according to the flesh while the son of the free woman was born through promise look on to verse 28 now you brothers like Isaac are children of promise Jews and Gentiles by faith alone true sons of the free woman verse 30 you are not children of the slave woman but of the free woman verse 31 sorry so Paul's whole interest throughout all of this argumentation of his is showing that there is one and only one seed of Abraham and one and only one way of being that seed faith in Christ nothing else counts it's by faith alone come back to verse 16 again the seed the one single way of salvation which is

Christ and again the context is the vital clue here all the way through this chapter Paul speaks of Christ in a special way he's not so much referring to him as a single individual but he's referring to all those who are intimately bound up in Christ those who have faith in him the word Christ he's using again and again as a representative body just the same way as he does in Romans chapter 5 for Paul you're either in Adam or you're in Christ and all the way through Galatians chapter 3 and into chapter 4 he's talking about two eras we mentioned that last week there's the old era which is the era of law it's the era of slaves and guardians it's what chapter 4 verse 8 describes as formerly but now he says there's the new era the fullness of the time has come chapter 4 verse 4 it's the era of faith verse 23 it's the era of the spirit it's the era of

Christ so Christ as he uses it in this verse is not so much Christ as a single person but Christ as the single way of salvation in verse 14 you see he says it's in Christ that the blessing comes to all to Jew and Gentile and in Christ alone salvation in Christ for all is the climax of the promise it's where it's been going right from the beginning and the only thing that counts is faith in Christ and that's why Paul is so emphatic here about the one seed which is Christ Christ because it means all those who are in Christ who are united to Christ as one people by faith alone by the promise alone not by faith and additional matters of the flesh anything that you do in terms of the law or anything else so to go back to the key question then who are the true seed of Abraham who are the privileged inheritors of the blessing of the spirit of the last days the answer is not those who believe and seek

to become

Jews rather verse 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God how by faith and by faith alone God gave the promise to Abraham and Abraham received it by faith alone he gives the promise to Abraham's one seed all those who believe and who trust in Christ alone for salvation you see there is only one church one people of God one Israel of God as he calls them in chapter 6 because the promise is fulfilled in Christ and then is one united people by faith alone there is not two kinds of seed there is only one one line of faith one line of promise and that's why he says in verse 27 that that one people of

God is no longer marked out by things like circumcision putting off the flesh that's something that leaves a fleshly mark that divides no what is that marks out the one people of God well it's baptism it's something that washes away all ethnic divisions leaves no marks on the body that's why he says in verse 27 as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ Christ is now the clothing that covers over every ethnic or religious distinctive that would separate Jew and Gentile or male or female or anybody else Christ obliterates every fleshly division whether it's ethnic or religious or cultural or class he alone is the defining identity of his people and so in verse 28 he says there is neither Jew or Greek neither slave nor free neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ

[41 : 13] Jesus no more division of things according to the flesh by nationality Jew or Gentile by rank high or low by sex only unity you are all plural one in Christ not two and verse 29 if you're Christ's you are all plural Abraham's not seeds seed one you are all heirs according to not circumcision not keeping Moses law not adding to the faith in Christ anything that you think you have to do or anybody tells you by promise and promise alone to whom the promise is given to Abraham and to his one seed that is to you he's saying to all who are in Christ by faith alone by promise alone not substituting anything not supplementing anything all one family of faith all inheritors of that one immutable unchangeable promise promise promise is to

Abraham and to his seed which is all who are in Christ and so the Galatians don't need to be told that their faith is inadequate and if only they could add this and this and this their Christian experience would be wonderful and neither do Glaswegians neither do you if you have faith in Christ you've got everything again why does it matter so much well do you see the implications of that there can be no two-tier Christianity it just can't be the day that you believe in Jesus Christ you've got everything everything nothing more is to come you're as right with God you're as intimate with God as the oldest wisest holiest Christian that you know and love and admire and long to be like you've got everything that they've got you don't need anything more to have what they have no special experiences to chase after no special blessings to be sold to you no endless penances to make up for the wrong things you keep doing all of that is to say

Christ died for nothing all of that is saying you're supplementing your work with his it's idolatry you're having another saviour another lord another god doesn't matter what it is whether it's your own strenuous efforts at holiness because you're a young zealous keen Christian or whether it's the burdens of other people's expectations on you or your own of yourself whether it's the endless rituals of religion can be a hundred and one thousand and one ways but no all of that is idolatry you don't need that yes of course you grow in your Christian life to maturity but that growth is all it's solely it's only as you get a greater and better and deeper understanding of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ of his promise which is to Abraham and to you that's the only thing that you need that's the only thing that counts there can be no two tier

Christianity neither can there be division in the true fellowship of the people of God there's no justification ever for separating the church on racial grounds or cultural grounds or grounds of hierarchy or anything else we're all brothers and sisters we simply must not harbour a sectarian spirit it can be so damaging so anti-gospel you know what Paul says to the Romans let us welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us not on grounds of what other people can do to impress us in our church no but on the grounds of God's gracious promise to all who have faith even as a mustard seed finally in closing this ultimate reality that there is only one way of salvation one gospel faith not two but there's one family one church not two is because ultimately there is one God and Lord not two the foundational principle of scripture is that

God is one God the Shema Jewish prayer Deuteronomy chapter 6 hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and Paul several times in his letters makes that point to show how obvious it is that God can only have one people not two and that may help us with verse 20 that other difficult verse

Bishop Lightfoot over a hundred years ago said that there were nearly 300 different interpretations for that verse then so goodness knows how many there are now I'm sure we can't have the last word but it may help us here because in verse 19 Paul is saying that the law is given through angels and by an intermediary and that implies more than one verse 20 but God is one I think his point is this the Mosaic era the era of the law glorious as it was for Israel and for the Jewish Christian missionaries who held it in high regard it was glorious but it couldn't possibly be the end in sight of God's plan precisely because

[47 : 04] Moses mediated a law that divided the world into Jews and Gentiles the Gentiles were left separated from God outside the Jews themselves were left quite at a distance because Moses had to mediate for them they were too scared to go close to the mountain they couldn't enter the tabernacle but God is one and the promise must be for more than this indeed in Romans 3 and 29 Paul uses the same language he says is God the God of Jews only is he not the God of Gentiles also yes of Gentiles also since God is one so it can't possibly be the end of the story yet he's saying it can only be the end of the story when he has one people and when there's no human mediator keeping them at a distance but they have intimacy with himself that's why Paul in 1st Timothy 2 says God desires all people to be saved not just Jews why for there is one

God and one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus you see there's one gospel one faith one church because there's one God and the gospel is all about God and his purpose and his glory salvation is all from him it's by his promise it's accomplished by him by one saviour it's Christ alone who's crucified it's Christ alone who's cursed for us he says Christ alone atones for everybody's sin Christ alone verse 22 who is the faithful one and it's his faithfulness his righteousness alone that saves us verse 22 says it's given to those who believe you see what that means just means this God is one and God is everything and that means that any tradition of man however good and right it may be in its time must serve him alone as soon as it's no longer serving him alone then the one true

God is not being worshipped and an idol is being worshipped God gave the Jews their law it was a glorious thing it was a gracious thing we'll see that next week it was to lead them to Christ but even that God ordained thing became in their hands an idol to lead them away from God and we've got to be very realistic about this because God gives many good and gracious gifts to bless us to help us but friends you must remember the human heart is a perpetual factory of idols he gives us good marriages good friends good jobs maybe a good church even good theology and in their right place they can be great servants of the plan and purpose of God but out of that place they can themselves easily become nothing more than idols so we're serving two gods but God is one and he will not give his glory to another and as believers who are privileged and blessed we need to remember that the gospel is all about God's glory it's not about our glory and that's why he's also declared one way of salvation for all that's why the bible is very clear there's no hope anywhere else for salvation but in

Christ alone not in Christ plus Judaism if you're a Jew today the only way that you can be a true descendant of Abraham is through faith in Jesus Christ if you're a Muslim today who harks back to the ancestry from Abraham the only way you can be a true descendant of Abraham is in Christ alone by faith can't be Jesus plus Muhammad or the Torah or Buddha or Krishna or what you do or anything else Christ alone because there's one God and one salvation there is and there only ever has been one church one faith and one Lord that's the eternal gospel of God either you've got it all by faith alone in Jesus Christ or you don't have any of it and that's the gospel that Paul's fighting for and friends that's the only gospel there is and it's the only gospel that is of any help and any hope to sinful people like you and me the moment the moment that even the tiniest addition is made everything's lost and that's why Paul fights to preserve one church one faith and one Lord well in a few minutes we're going to have a practical demonstration of this because we're going to be admitting into membership into the full privilege of belonging to Christ and the people of Christ here in this fellowship by faith alone in Christ before we go