**“ONE” Series**

**The Biblical View of Humanity in a Time of Racial Tension**

**“One Family”**

**Galatians 3.26-29**

**Introduction**

Today we come to the last sermon in our series entitled “ONE.” The goal of this series has been to gain a biblical view of humanity in a time of racial tension. We began the series by considering how the Bible teaches that all of humanity came from one blood. We noted that the Apostle Paul told the philosophers of Athens that “(God) *has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth.”* (Acts 17.26a) In this short statement Paul underscores the truth that the Creator of all things in general is the Creator of humanity in particular and out of one man, Adam, God made every nation on the face of the earth. This means that all of humanity is one blood and there is no room for ideas of racial superiority.

Last week we look at the creation account recorded in the first chapter of the book of Genesis where the divine pattern of “*God said, ‘Let there be*,’” changes to, “*God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness*.’” We noted that the divine activity of creation paused for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to conduct a solemn counsel together concerning the creation of their crowning act – the creation of humanity! Only man did God formed with His own hands. Only man did God breathe into his nostrils the breathe of life. Only man did God give dominion over all of creation. Only man did God enter into a covenant relationship. But above all of these truths, is the reality that God created humanity in His image and according to His likeness. Therefore every person is an image bearer and this image is what distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation. We love because God is love and has given us the ability to love. We seek for knowledge because God is all knowing and has given us the capacity for knowledge. We long for justice because God is just and has given us the desire for justice. We show mercy because God is merciful and has given us a heart to show mercy. Understanding that man was created in one image according to God’s likeness gives us a proper way to view humanity, a proper understanding for human dignity, and an attitude of respect all people regardless of race or nationality.

The fact that all of humanity shares in one blood and one image under scores the biblical truth that we are all one family. The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”* (Gal.3.26-29)

**One Family**

The churches of Galatia were made up of both Jews and Greeks and Paul wanted to undergird the reality that people of all nations are all members of one family of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear that *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (3.28) But this “one family reality” wasn’t always accepted in the church. Even though Jesus made it clear that the Church would be made of people of all nations, the early church had a difficult time accepting that the church would be one family from many nationalities and backgrounds.

After issuing the great commission to *make disciples of all the nations* and to *proclaimed in His name to all the nations* and telling His disciples that they would be His witnesses *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth* it took the church of Jerusalem over five years to take the Gospel beyond the borders of Jerusalem. (Mt.28.19-20; Lk.24.46-47; Acts 1.8; 8.1, 4) Up to that time the Church was comprised of people from a Jewish background. It took a great persecution against the church to get the church of Jerusalem out of their cultural comfort zone. But those who were scattered into Judea and Samaria because of the persecution only spoke the Word of God to Jews. (Acts 11.19) But finally there was a break through when a few these persecuted believers began sharing the Gospel to Greeks. And the Bible records that as a result a large number of Greeks became believers in Jesus Christ. (Acts 11.20-21) What I’m trying to point out is that it took the church over five years before sharing the Gospel with a people from a different nationality. And as you continue to read the book of Acts you will see that it took fifteen years before Christian missionaries were intentional sent out to the Gentile world. (Acts 2.41; 13.1-3ff)

I know we like to think of the early church as being perfect but the book of Acts shows us that the early church was made up of real people with real difficulties with welcoming people from different cultures. So when you compare the historical record in the book of Acts with Paul’s inspired words in the book of Galatians, “*if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise,”* you will see the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church to accept all those who belong to Christ as members of one family regardless of race, nationality, or social class.(Gal.3.26-29)

One of the greatest testimonies of this transforming work of the Holy Spirit to open a person’s heart to this “one family reality” is seen in the life of the Apostle Peter. Peter was raised Jewish and was called by Christ Himself to be His disciple. (Mt.4.18-22) Peter followed Christ throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry and was called by Christ to lead the early church. (Mt.16.18) Peter’s leadership was instrumental in the life of the early church. (Acts 1.15; 2.14) But it becomes obvious that Peter had real difficulties with welcoming those outside of the Jewish culture as members of one family.

Nearly seven years after preaching his inaugural sermon giving at the birth to the Church on the day of Pentecost, one day Peter went up on the housetop to have his noontime prayers. During his prayer time Peter became hungry. And while it might sound funny the Lord used Peter’s hunger to teach him the “one family reality” of the church. While Peter was praying the Lord gave him a dream. In this dream Peter *saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,**and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and*

*crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.* The great sheet coming down by the four corners represent the Lord covering the “four corners of the earth.” The Old Testament law considered the type of animals and creatures coming out of the sheet to be unclean to eat. But *a voice came to him, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat!” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything* *unholy and unclean.” Again a voice came to him a second time, “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.” This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.* (Acts 10.11-16)

*While Peter was reflecting on the dream, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself.”* (Acts 10.19-20) These three men were Gentiles who had been sent to ask Peter to return with them to the home of a Gentile Roman military officer by the name Cornelius. Upon his arrival to Cornelius’ home Peter said to those who had gathered, *“You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for.* (Acts 10.28-29) This is the first glimpse we have into Peter’s heart. Even though he heard Jesus say with his own ears to *make disciples of all the nations* and to *proclaimed in His name to all the nations* and that he was to be a witness for Christ *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth,* Peter considered non-Jews as unholy and unclean foreigners and he didn’t associate with such people. This was a leading Apostle of the Church! Can you believe it?But God through the dream had shown Peter that he should not call a person unholy or unclean. God had done a radical work in Peter’s heart to finally enabled him to embrace the “one family reality” in the church. Peter finally understood that Christ had opened the door to all people to enter into God’s family of faith. *What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”* Peter went on tell those gathered in Cornelius’ house, *“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.* (Acts 10.34-35) Peter finally got it! Peter concluded if God welcomes people from every nation then I should welcome people from every nation. And when Peter saw that the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house after hearing the Gospel he said, *“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?”**And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.* (Acts 10.47-48) Peter commands that these new Gentile believers should receive the initiation sacrament of the church - baptism.

**One Family Reality**

In that moment Peter finally fulfilled Christ’s command to *go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit*. (Mt.28.18) Peter finally understood the “one family reality” of the church. After staying at Cornelius’ house for a few days Peter returned to Jerusalem. Upon his arrival Peter was asked to explain why he went to “uncircumcised men and ate with them.” (Acts 11.1-3) Peter explained to the church of Jerusalem about the dream, his three-man escort to Cornelius’ house, the transformation that took place in his heart, and what happened as he shared the Gospel to the Gentiles gathered in Cornelius’ house. The Bible tells us that *when they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the*

*repentance that leads to life.”* (Acts 11.4-18) What a breakthrough! Peter would later tell the Jerusalem Council that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles and would later write that believers should honor all men, and love the brotherhood. (Acts 15.9; IPt.2.17a)

Brothers and sisters, Christ has broken down the dividing wall and reconciled all of us into one body to God through the cross. So then, we are no longer strangers and aliens, but we are fellow citizens with the saints, we are God’s household. We are all members of God’s family! (Eph.2.13-19) The Lord is assembling a great multitude, which no one can count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples, and tongues that will one day gather before the throne and before the Lamb as one family. Therefore we are all spiritual siblings. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore as the Lord tarries we should *be devoted to one another* *in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;**not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,**contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.* (Rom.12.10-13) These are the family characteristics of God’s family.

The German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in his book Life Together, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we must participate.” We must engage and continue to engage in the “one family reality” in the church by showing tangible expression of affection to our family members.

But these days of COVID have hindered us from showing tangible expression of our family relationship. For example five times in the New Testament Epistles, we are called to greet one another with a “holy kiss.” (Rom.16.16; ICor.16.20; 2Cor.13.12; IThes.5.26; IPt.5.14) But in these times of COVID the “holy kiss” has been replaced with the “holy nod, the holy wave, the holy fist bump, or the holy chicken wing.” But these expressions of family affection just don’t seem to compare to the “holy kiss.”

But I was thinking that throughout the Apostle Paul’s ministry he was often physically distant from the churches he loved. But his physical separation didn’t stop the Apostle from demonstrating his love for his church family. He could still pray for them, write to them, and to express to his church family his desire to be with them. And these are the things we should be doing during this time of separation due to the virus.

Maybe we can’t greet one another with a “holy kiss” or a “holy hug” but we can and should continue to show tangible expressions of affection to our spiritual family by using all the means that God has given us. I was raised in a tight family. The priorities in our family were first the Lord, then our family, and then the church family. With those priorities came family obligations. Just as life in a biological family impacts everything from our schedules to our bank account, life in the spiritual family changes the way we live. Acknowledging the truth of the “one family reality” in the church should encourage us all to willing take up our family responsibilities. Of course, caring for the family is sometimes frustrating and often tiring, ask any mother of toddlers or an adult child caring for elderly parents, and caring for the church family is no different. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are not always agreeable or thankful, and meeting their needs often requires sacrifice, but because they are family we do what family does. Like the members of our biological family, we haven’t chosen them for ourselves, but they have been chosen for us, and we are in separately bound to them. And so it is with our spiritual family.

**Closings Thought**

The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews writes a very striking statement when he wrote, *“For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,”* (Heb.2.11) How can this be? How can Christ look at weak, flawed, and sometimes-difficult members of His family and not be ashamed? He is not ashamed because we are being increasingly being sanctified (spiritually transformed) and He knows that one day that transformation will be complete when we stand together as a great multitude around the throne and before the Lamb as one family.

Brothers and sisters, we must seek the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts to enable us to embrace and to continue to embrace the “one family reality” of the church. *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* We are one blood, reflecting one image, and living as one family.

**Call to Prayer**

*Now as to the love of the brethren . . . we urge you, brethren, to excel still more* (IThes.4.9-10)