

We are going to touch on some topics the text leads us to that we need to prepare for because it is complex and challenging as it deals with a sharp conflict and confrontation that took place in the early church around the blatant ethnocentrism that was at the center of the early church movement. What I mean by ethnocentrism is the belief of superiority or elevation of one's ethnicity above that of another.

On July 19, 1962, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in an address before the National Press Club in Washington D.C., made these remarks:

**As a minister of the gospel, I am ashamed to have to affirm that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, when we stand to sing "In Christ There is no East nor West," is the most segregated hour of America, and the Sunday school is the most segregated school of the week. But in spite of this appalling fact, we are beginning to shake the lethargy from our souls...As the church continues to take a forthright stand on this issue, the transition from a segregated to an integrated society will be infinitely smoother. Hope, 101; July 19, 1962**

If you are familiar with his writings and other works, you will find that this particular address would fit easily into his appropriately strong critical framework of the Church's complicity in the racial injustice that has plagued this country since its inception. In many respects, we have made progress as a culture in the area of breaking down the injustices of racism. And yet, in significantly tragic ways, we have failed to make the progress that Dr. King and so many others have dreamed.

What I find most poignant in King's words is the challenge that the Church's role in society is to model a multi-ethnic community, and in that modeling, to create a smoother pathway for our country. For King, it was not a side issue the church must address but was an affront to a community animated by the gospel. And King is in good company because, we will see in this text, Paul also saw ethnocentrism as an affront to the gospel.

In Galatians 2, Paul directly confronts issues of ethnocentrism in the Galatian church. And he does so strongly because, for Paul, it was not an ancillary issue but was an affront to the gospel. The ethnocentrism that was perpetuated by the church was for Paul, and I quote, "not acting in line with the truth of the gospel."

**The people of God - God's Ekklesia - is a multi-ethnic family built solely on those in union with Christ.**

We are going to start in the book of Acts, and then we will get to the Galatians 2 text. We have to look at the backstory of what is going on in order to approach the Galatians text in context. What is going on is Peter, while in Joppa, was asleep on the roof of a building when he gets

hungry and he has a vision. The heavens open up and a blanket starts to fall from heaven. On the blanket is all sorts of different animals. As the blanket is descending a voice from heaven comes out and instructs Peter, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (Acts 10:13).

Peter is now at a challenging crossroads because everything that was in the blanket was considered unclean to touch or to eat according to the law, something he would have had ingrained in him since childhood. Not only was this not to be eaten, it was to be avoided entirely.

So Peter says, "No!" he thinks he is resisting the temptation to regress and fail in his faith. But a voice speaks to him saying to not call anything unclean, which God has made clean. Peter wakes up, and then three men come to his door, and the Spirit tells Peter to go downstairs and go with the men looking for him. He does so, and they all go to Caesarea, where Cornelius is waiting for them. A large crowd is present at Cornelius' house, and this is where we pick up the story.

**He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our Law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"**  
Acts 10:28-29

So Peter is reminding them that this is against their law, that Jews associating with non-Jews was against the law. But now, God had said something different to him in a vision; the gospel had opened a new reality. Peter went on to preach to this crowd at Cornelius' house the broadening new reality of the gospel.

**While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days. Acts 10:44-48**

Did you catch that? Peter preaches, the Holy Spirit falls, and everyone in the place is filled with the Spirit. This moment is a huge moment in connection to the meta-narrative of the scriptures. What has just happened is the fulfillment of what God promised all the way back to Abraham.

In Genesis 12, sin is wreaking havoc on the world, and God goes to Abraham and says that through his story and his lineage, he will bring about a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. And up until this