

June 16, 2019
Since God Is One
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Romans 3:21-31

²¹ Now we see how God does make us acceptable to him. The Law and the Prophets tell how we become acceptable, and it isn't by obeying the Law of Moses. ²² God treats everyone alike. He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ. ²³ All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. ²⁴ But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. ²⁵⁻²⁶ God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood so that by faith in him we could come to God. And God did this to show that in the past he was right to be patient and forgive sinners. This also shows that God is right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷ What is left for us to brag about? Not a thing! Is it because we obeyed some law? No! It is because of faith. ²⁸ We see that people are acceptable to God because they have faith, and not because they obey the Law. ²⁹ Does God belong only to the Jews? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is! ³⁰ There is only one God, and he accepts Gentiles as well as Jews, simply because of their faith. ³¹ Do we destroy the Law by our faith? Not at all! We make it even more powerful. [Contemporary English Version]

Let's pray . . . that our own little lives and our life together will be conformed to your law, O God. May this be our highest hope. For each of us to love you with our whole heart, with all our mind, all our strength and all our soul, to love each and every neighbor as we ourselves are loved by you. Amen.

Since there is only one God, he accepts Gentiles as well as Jews, simply because of their faith, says the Apostle Paul.

Gentiles plus Jews equal the whole world. We divide the world differently – into Gentiles we like and Gentiles we don't. God is God of Gentiles we don't like and loves them like God loves us. They are our brothers and sisters, *since God is one.*

We've agreed we're monotheists, the Trinity notwithstanding. Maybe we aren't as committed to *all* being included as we are to monotheism, as committed to one body as to one God – as if they are different.

That *God is one* is not the problem, is it? It's the "*God is the same God of us all*" part, the "*God is the same God TO us all*" part that has Paul's readers up in arms, then and since. Now included.

In March it was the Methodists getting all the press, remember? In June, Baptists take our turn. I expect you've seen the news this week that the SBC voted not to recognize the term *gay Christian* in reference to persons or groups – lest they fail to call a sin a sin. They'd have gotten better coverage were it not for a Baptist preacher in Tennessee. His shenanigans don't bear repeating here.

Honestly, friends, I'm with you in the horror and frustration. But when I can generate a sliver of compassion, my best guess is that he was terribly mistreated once upon a time. Such hate generally comes from deeply wounded souls, such venom from a soul begging not to be hurt again, a soul that may believe he is protecting others. Here's the thing: God does not protect us by attacking us nor abandoning us, but by loving us and joining us where we are in this life. Including us in God's oneness. Besides – unto what could God abandon us, if all that is, was made by God? is sustained by God?

To whom or where can anyone be banished ever, if God is everywhere, if God is all that is? We've already agreed on that, remember? *I will never leave you orphaned*, Jesus said. Did he mean it is impossible? Around and around I go with these thoughts. They are my lens upon scriptures. Then we come to Romans – and Paul. Telling Jews they will not escape this brotherhood of theirs. This sisterhood.

If there is only God and God is all there is, they are ALL my brothers and my sisters. We are made of the same stuff; your life, my life, our lives – atoms of the same living universe, just housed in different skins. Life made from the breath of God, conformed to God's own image somehow. LeBron James and me: same stuff (go figure) which is the life which is God.

The heart is a poor sermon writer, where sentences run on and statements read like questions when they are not. Truth is what I'm casting for – and catching very little. Yet gospel truth will not be grasped by my brain or yours. Nor faith. Faith doesn't come to us intellectually. Faith lives on the ground in our hands and feet and mouths, in what we do, what we say, with these bodies – these lives – of ours.

Paul preached to congregations not unlike us gathered here. Folks who worked and raised kids and fretted about the bills. Who believed in Jesus and wanted to be faithful – but had no small bit to learn about how. *The gospel of Jesus Christ is how*, Paul said. *This is the entire syllabus*. What measure of the gospel comes to life in and through the church is the measure of your faithfulness. The salvation of the whole world in the death and resurrection of Jesus – those are the words.

The resurrected Jesus in the world today – that's you. And you. And us together as we live it, those same gospel words now brought to life, measured in our unity – our conformity – to the love he's given us, doled out to one another and our neighbors. Not in the flash and awe of programs, but in our contact with other human beings, however

subtle and small the appearance. Popsicles and peanut butter sandwiches, for example; a whole building that smells like sweaty kids.

Paul's first reading congregation struggled to believe he meant them to love each other like family. Business partners, maybe. Acquaintances, okay. But family? Yes, family. Since God is one, there are no other parents. God is all any of us have, making us all kin, whatever else feels true, however much we don't like it.

Here we are, Rainbow Baptists sitting down with the ones from Tennessee, and we'll do as we've been told or not. But the measure of our obedience will be the gospel serving that the world receives from us. Paul – crazy Paul – got saved, rescued like a swimmer drowning in devotion to a truth he did not understand. *One God could have just one people*, he was told. That part he got right. *Your people are that people* was the part his people mistook, the part he got saved from, then told to go save others.

Since God is One and God only has one people, all people are God's, Paul said, about a million times – a good lot of them in a letter to the Romans. In chapter 3, verse 21, he gets down to business, the Jesus part of his story. He'll really pull it apart starting in chapter 9. For now, he simply says again: does God belong to you folks on the right? oh yes? How about you over on the left? Yep, you too.

Does that mean everything you learned before about kindness, justice, and humility doesn't mean a thing? For heaven's sakes, no. Now it means more than ever. Would you pray with me, friends?