

The Gospel Is Worth Getting Feisty About

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[0 : 00] All right. Now, one of the things we talked about as we were getting ready for like in-person-ness of all of this was, if you're anything like me, you got used to sitting on a couch at home, like maybe some of you are right now, and you were double screening it.

Raise your hand if you know what double screening is, and you did it. Yeah, you're right. You got something on the TV, and you got something in the hands, and your attention is split with these two things, right?

Okay. I'm not alone. Good. So I want to lean into this double screening. Get out your phone right now, and there is a webpage that I'm going to invite you to go to.

Instructions are coming up. Called slido.com, and you're going to enter in the code tablechurch. Slido.com tablechurch.

And it's got a question up there that you're going to put in your answer, and in warning, what you put on in the answer will show up on the screen. All right? All right. Now, we're all adults. So you're using this as like the bathroom stall for vanity space. Do that somewhere else, okay?

[1 : 08] So you're going to put in the answer to this question. What have you, and if you're doing this on the live stream, double screen it. Get the phone out. Do the thing. Slido.com, code tablechurch. What have you been told about being part of a, quote-unquote, progressive, or affirming, or liberal, or inclusive, or social justice, or otherwise, not traditional church?

So probably, maybe, somebody has found out that you go to a church like the table church, and find out that we believe these, like, quote-unquote, progressive and affirming things, and someone has taken it upon themselves to tell you, well, you shouldn't go there because, or you must not believe in God because.

Now, I put this together, like, on Wednesday, and I didn't know this was going to happen, but I got a Facebook comment today along these lines, and this is what it says.

It says, it's sad, but your God, this comment to me, isn't the same God that I worship. After looking at the church you pastor, hello, and reading who you are and what you believe, your God and gospel message isn't the same God and gospel message as taught by the apostles, and the reformers, and the Puritans, and Spurgeon, and theologians today that accurately interpret Scripture.

Your view on women totally contradicts Scripture, including the marriage of LGBTQ couples, plus your views on social and political issues. You misinterpret Scripture to validate your modern-day views of society, and, this person comments, that is heresy.

[2 : 33] You will have to answer to a sovereign and holy God on Judgment Day for misleading your church attendees. And then he ends it. You've got to love this. Three exclamation points. Have a great day. What did you put? Not centered on God. Not welcoming of conservatives. You are committing sin.

You're all going to hell. Huh. Dot, dot, dot. Interesting. Not real. Be wary. They only talk about God's love, not the reality of sin that Jesus had to die for.

Yeah, yeah, you get the idea. Now, here's the thing that I want to suggest, is that the Apostle Paul would have had the same kinds of things said about him.

Here's some more quotes, just for fun, about what has been said about progressive Christianity. Go to the next slide, Heidi. It says, The counterfeit gospel is under the guise of progressive Christianity, yet, if you hold this doctrine up to the light, it will be missing the watermarked face of God.

This person writes on some website somewhere. This doctrine is worthless and void of truth and robs the soul of the true joy of Christ. Do not be deceived, they say. Some of the core ideas spread by this relatively new sect of progressive Christians are fragmenting through the body of Christ like shrapnel.

[3 : 47] Oh, dear. We must guard our hearts and minds with the armor of God and strike back with the sword of truth. Next quote. The movement called progressive Christianity seeks to redefine what it means to be a Christian.

And although it is marketed as, quote, unquote, the real thing, core essential doctrines are abandoned or radically redefined. Progressive Christianity utilizes scripture, employs Christian vocabulary, and claims to follow the teachings of Jesus, they say.

And although it looks and smells and sounds like the real thing, ends up being more like fake brie than the historic Christian gospel. Sorry, vegans or any other lovers of fake brie. At the end of the day, the unifying beliefs of their movement add up to counterfeit truths.

One more. The progressive version of Christianity becomes a different gospel. Many young people are attracted to its social justice emphasis because they see real prejudices and biases.

And they have a heart of solidarity for those who seem marginalized and outcast. But they're forgetting the real liberating truths of the gospel. The apostle Paul would be accused of the same things today.

[4 : 56] We've been in the middle of a series called Everybody Gets to Play. And we've been looking at the book of Acts, the book of Luke, and the story of Jesus and his followers and how they invite everybody into God's kingdom.

Everybody into this thing that we call church. And the apostle Paul was somebody that, if you hang out with, you know, some progressive folks, isn't all that popular.

Because he often gets maligned for being sexist or misogynist or homophobic or other things like that. Well, what I want to say today is that Paul was accused of these same problems, these same things.

Of having a heretical gospel, of going too far, of focusing on the wrong thing, of needing to repent. And that's what Paul had to deal with in his day. Because Paul preached a fairly radical gospel.

Here are some quotes from Paul throughout scripture. Colossians 2 says, Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why as though you still belong to the world do you submit to its rules?

[6 : 03] This is the world's rules, according to Paul. Do not handle. Do not taste. Do not touch. Could be also the CDC's rules, but whatever. These rules, which have to do with things that are destined to perish with use, are based merely on human commands and teachings.

Or Paul says this in Romans 5, Just as Adam's one sin resulted in condemnation for all people, so also Jesus' one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

This is radical stuff. 1 Corinthians 15, For as in Adam all die, Paul says, So in Christ all will be made alive. Colossians 3, Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

For Paul, the only people who do not belong are the people who say that there are people who do not belong. Sorry if that's a little billow back and tore you.

I'll say it again. For Paul, the only people who don't belong are people who say that there are people who don't belong. This is what Paul preaches, and this is what gets Paul constantly, if you read through the book of Acts and his story, as you piece it together through the letters of the New Testament, this is what gets Paul constantly in trouble, is for going too far, saying the wrong thing, including and inviting the wrong people without making those wrong people do the right things.

[7 : 38] Let me tell you an example. So if you have a Bible, I invite you to join me in the book of Galatians chapter 1. Galatians chapter 1. Paul is dealing with a situation in which there are teachers that have gone to the church of the region of Galatia, which is where the Celts come from.

They go to the churches in this region, and they say, you listen to Paul? Don't listen to Paul. Listen to us. Paul is a heretic.

Paul is taking you astray from the gospel. Paul is leading you to all the wrong things, believing all the wrong things, but all the wrong people. No, no, no. Listen to us. And so Paul has to write this letter to say, hold on a second.

This is what he writes in Galatians chapter 1. Paul says, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is, and this is key right here, not really good news at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or Paul says, an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let them be under God's curse.

[8 : 54] So what's happening in the region of Galatia is that there are people who are coming and saying, if you want to be part of the church, part of what God is up to, part of God's kingdom, then you have to have the physical markers of that as well.

And namely, we talked about this last week, for males, that was circumcision. So Paul goes, a bunch of people get saved in Galatia. Paul travels on, a different set of teachers come in and say, yeah, Paul, he's cool and all, but he has a lot wrong.

You have to be circumcised to belong. Paul is saying, I can't believe you are believing this. Skip ahead to Galatians chapter two. Paul is telling a story about how he has come to believe what he has believed and how steadfast he has been in these beliefs that anybody can belong and that you don't have to have these physical markers to belong.

So Paul says this, he says, when Cephas, another name for Peter, the apostle Peter, came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

So set the scene a little bit. Peter's in Antioch. Peter comes to Antioch. Peter is eating with anybody, Jews, Gentiles. Peter eats with anybody.

[10 : 10] Then some men come up from Jerusalem from James. James is the brother of Jesus and is leading the church in Jerusalem. So these men come from James in Jerusalem to Antioch.

Peter sees the men of James come. And when they arrived, Paul says, Peter began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles. Peter is basically trying to be like, oh, these people I look up to and should respect, they're peer pressuring me into basically racism.

They're peer pressuring me into separating myself from the Gentiles. He was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group, which is a really fun group to be a part of.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. So this is the story. Paul is in Antioch.

Peter comes to Antioch. Everybody is eating together, enjoying each other's company. Then the circumcision group, registered trademark, comes to town. Peter sees them and says, oh, I better clean up my act and not actually hang out with these people after all.

[11 : 20] Paul sees Peter act like a hypocrite and Paul goes to Peter and opposes him to his face. Now, this circumcision group from James, we see what happens to them.

We saw this in our sermon last week that there's a big council, a big meeting in Jerusalem. James changes his mind and says, let's not make it difficult for anyone to belong.

That's the end of the story. We kind of did it in reverse in terms of our sermons. But what I see when I see this circumcision group, this group of folks who are saying, Jews can't hang out with Gentiles unless Gentiles change their bodies.

Only certain people can hang out with certain people unless everybody does specifically what we tell them to. This is what I see. Excluders always have and always will try to, number one, convince you that they are more holy.

Excluders will always try to be, to take the high ground, the moral ethical high ground. Well, yes, I know what it sounds like I'm doing is excluding or discriminating or being racist or being homophobic in some way, but actually I'm the holy one and you're the one who's not.

[12 : 32] Excluders will always try to convince you that they're the ones who have the higher ground and try to make you feel like you don't. Number two, they will paint, so if you click, those words should fill in, Heidi.

Yeah, there you go. Number two, they will paint their bigotry as, quote, the loving thing to do. Well, I want to exclude these people. I want to change the way they behave or the way that they treat their bodies.

I want them to do these sorts of things because I love them and care deeply for them and that's why I'm being so exclusionary towards them. Number three, they will attempt to bully you into agreeing with them.

And so they'll get onto your Facebook page, in my case, and tell you how you're a heretic and that you will stand in front of God and be judged. They will tell you that, well, if you go to this kind of church to believe those kinds of things, well, then you must have abandoned the gospel.

You're just trying to believe what you want to believe and you don't want to, you're just trying to ignore scripture. That's what excluders try to do. But we see in Paul's actions with Peter that confronting discrimination isn't merely permissible.

[13 : 46] It's necessary. Paul sees what Peter is doing. Peter, who is eating, enjoying the company of everybody, changes his behavior because the bullies come to town and Paul goes to Peter and confronts him.

He says, you're being a hypocrite. And Paul shows us that this isn't just like, well, maybe this is the thing I should do occasionally. No, Paul shows us that this is necessary. That when the bullies come to town and try to tell you, no, you actually do need to exclude.

You actually do need to say who's in and who's out and draw the lines based off of behavior and belief and bodies. Paul shows us that, no, we got to confront that kind of bigotry.

We see this in verse 11 of chapter two, Paul, quote, opposed Peter to his face. This was not like a friendly conversation. This was getting up in each other's faces, ignoring CDC guidelines and getting up there and saying, what have you done, brother?

Verse 14, we see that Paul calls Peter out in front of everybody. Peter should know better. We see in Acts chapter 10, that Peter has to be shown a vision from God three times in order to get it through Peter's admittedly thick law, that he should not call anybody unclean.

[15:07] He has had the vision from God. He has helped lead Gentiles. He has helped lead the outsider to become the insider. Gentiles to become followers of Jesus. And then here's Peter doing it again.

Oh, James's people are here. I'm going to change my behavior and act like the hypocrite. Paul opposes Peter to his face, calls him out in front of them all. Paul, we see, oppose the excluders, this circumcision party.

Paul takes a stance. And again, remember what I said earlier. Paul is happy to take stances against those who exclude others. It's not that Paul was so wishy-washy in his beliefs that he's like, well, I see that you're being, you know, exclusionary and discriminatory, but I'm just going to let that be because it's just one big happy party.

No, one big happy party means that you do put a line around the idea of those who are excluding others. So Paul publicly opposes the excluders.

He corrects his friend Peter, and he stands in solidarity with the excluded. He opposes the excluders. He corrects his friend Peter, and he stands in solidarity with the excluders because all these Gentiles that got left out, that Peter was hanging out with, and then backs away slowly because he sees James' people.

[16:30] They're watching what Paul is going to do. Paul has staked his life and his career and his ministry on saying everybody gets to play, and they're watching what Paul is going to do. And so Paul gets up and opposes and corrects, and they know that they have a partner and a colleague and a friend in Paul.

So where are the places that we need to oppose the excluders to correct our friends and to stand in solidarity with those who might be left out?

Get your phone out again. Head back to Slido. I'm going to change the question. The question is, how do you do with confrontation?

Option one, I love it. Let me at him. Number two, my heart beats fast, and I get clammy, but I do it. Number three, I prefer not to most of the time. Number four, I'd rather die.

Oh, we're 50-50 right now. I prefer not to. Yeah, yeah. I love watching this. This is fun. This is making for great television, I'm sure.

[17:40] So we got a bunch of prefer not tos. We got, you know, a fifth of us, I'd rather die. Oh, we're getting smaller. Yeah, that's interesting.

So we got, you know, the two kind of middle options are up top, and then we're split between the I love it, let me at him, and I'd rather die. Oh, they're getting smaller. Interesting. So I'm like, hmm.

Depends on the day. I love it, let me at him describes you most of the time. Um, and if anything, like in college, I started fights.

I have been sanctified since then, and have not gone to start fights as much. I, do you feel like this is true, though? Like, folks in D.C. or the DMV are probably a little bit more high confrontation than the average of the rest of the country?

Does that resonate? I feel like that might be true. There are not a lot of I'd rather dies, but just know you're not alone out there. That's good. That's good. Confrontation is a necessary skill.

[18:51] Conflict is neutral. Conflict is the natural thing that happens when you put you in a room alone by yourself, because you might be in conflict with yourself, or you put two people in a room together.

There will be some sort of conflict because we're different. We're not all the same. Conflict is neutral. How we handle that conflict is not. And we have to learn the skill of being able to confront well and to confront for things that are worthwhile.

Galatians, if we were to keep reading in this letter, you can go to the next slide. It says this, chapter 5. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. This is the book where Paul writes this fruit of the Spirit. But what I love about Paul is that just a few verses before, about 10 verses before, Paul says this about the false teachers that go to Galatia.

As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way to emasculate themselves. So the same dude who writes, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace, and self-control, 10 verses later says, yeah, those people who want you to get circumcised, if they could just like do the whole thing, that'd be great.

[20 : 01] Paul's feisty. For Paul, the fruit of the Spirit is not an excuse to be polite about injustice. Writer of the Fruit of the Spirit demands that we defend a gospel worth believing in.

The fruit of the Spirit is not an excuse to be like, well, I see this injustice happening, but I'm a loving, joyful, peaceful person, and so I'm just not going to get involved. No, the point of Paul's entire letter is to get involved, to say, no, stop it.

Stop excluding. Stop trying to put yourself in control of other people's bodies to decide who's in and who's out. The point of Paul's entire letter to the Galatians is, no, you've got to put an end to this kind of injustice.

The fruit of the Spirit is not an excuse to be mousy. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit to be a loving and joyful and peaceful and patient and kind kind of person will set us up to get into the fray and to say, hey, all you who are trying to draw these thick black lines about who's in and who's out, because of the love and joy and peace and patience I have in my heart, I need to speak up and say, please put an end to this.

In the gospel, that's worth defending. Paul writes, again, in the book of Galatians chapter 3, the gospel is this, that in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

[21 : 24] For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor there is male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

It is not that the differences between us, or that there are no differences between us, it is that those differences are causes to celebrate, not reasons to divide.

I'll say that again. It is not that there are no differences between us. It is that those differences are causes to celebrate, not reasons to divide.

Friends, when I look at the life of Paul, I see that the gospel is worth getting feisty about. It is worth speaking up and standing up and saying, no, we believe in something that's worth believing in that is actually good news.

We're not have to twist the definition of good to make it good. We can say, no, God is actually for us. God is with us. God is on our side. And that is a gospel that's worth standing up for and believing.

[22 : 30] And so when you are being bullied, when someone is trying to tell you that they have the holy high ground, you don't have to feel mousy about it. You don't have to feel ashamed of what it is that you believe.

You can stand up for it and say, no, this is a gospel worth believing in and speaking up and standing up for.