

The Gospel In Galatians: Lesson 3

The Unity Of The Gospel

Memory Text: “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (Philippians 2:2)

Setting The Stage: The Lord wants us to be together. He wants us to be in unity. But where there is talk about unity the issue of compromise arises because there’s a tension between them - how much do you compromise (if at all) to achieve unity?

Galatians 2:1-10. Here’s the background. When Paul would travel to Galatia and other Gentile cities, he would go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel first. He would go to synagogues to preach the gospel. Sometimes he was successful, other times he was not. The Jews already had a background to the gospel and so it would make sense to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT prophecies concerning His first coming.

After Paul had preached to the Jews he would share the gospel with the Gentiles. And Paul didn’t require that the Gentile converts be circumcised or keep the ceremonial feasts. In some communities this caused great consternation among the Jewish Christian’s who believed it would alienate the Jews by not requiring them to keep the laws of Moses.

As you recall, a “General Conference Session” had already decided to not place any undue burdens on the Gentiles converts regarding the ceremonial laws (Acts 15). Of course they weren’t to eat things that had been strangled, or blood, and they were to keep themselves from fornication and idolatry. The decision had been made (biblical and Spirit led), and now all the churches were to follow suit to promote unity.

The Jewish Christians really needed to show unity with the Gentile converts. They were supposed to be one. They weren’t supposed to be meeting in two different groups. What kind of message was that going to send to the unconverted? Genuine unity was being threatened. And this is what Paul is dealing with in Galatians.

Sunday – The Importance Of Unity

1 Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:21; John 13:35; Psalm 133:1

1 Corinthians 1:10-13: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Apollos,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of

Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

There were divisions and Paul admonished the believers in Corinth to come together. Why was this important?

John 17:21: “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Christ said that there should be an oneness between the believers. We should strive toward unity. When was the Holy Spirit poured out upon God’s people? Acts 2:1 says that they were in one place and in one accord. They weren’t always united were they? On the night of the Lord’s supper they were still contending about who would be the greatest. If the Holy Spirit is going to be poured out upon God’s people today for a finished work, we also need to be united. If 131 million people are born into the world each year and our church adds 1 million new members a year, it’s going to have to take something extraordinary to complete the work, isn’t it. God will pour out the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal power when we are also united, when there is a unity of faith (because true unity is based on truth as it is in Jesus).

Acts 1:14 tells us that the disciples prayed and supplicated the throne of grace. It also says they were working to appoint someone to replace Judas. They were making wrongs right, humbling their hearts before God, and doing things that would strengthen the church and it’s mission. It was in this environment that the Holy Spirit was poured out. We need this experience today don’t we?

John 13:35: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The most effective evangelistic tool we have in our arsenal is not primarily our diet, our dress, our choice of entertainment, or even our love for the world; it is the love we have for each other. The devil is working to bring disunity into our church. If loving each other draws people to the church, then division will drive people away. That’s why the devil works toward disunity.

Whenever I do marriage counseling, the biggest problems couples face is pride and selfishness. Somebody won’t apologize. Somebody has to have their way. It’s not often about the issues, but about a persons right to be right. And it’s often that way in the church. In most cases division exists because people are clinging tenaciously to their right to be right.

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 9, p. 279) One of the keys to unity is humility – being willing to put aside our differences.

In the upper room as the disciples waited the Promise of the Father; I'm sure Peter needed to confess his jealousy when James and John wanted to be seated at the right and left of Jesus in what they thought was going to be His newly established kingdom on earth. James and John also needed to confess their attitudes of superiority too. Peter probably had to admit publically that although the others had forsaken Jesus, he had actually denied Jesus as well. This brought unity.

Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

If only all the families in the churches can be that way. The enemy is out there. We don't need friendly fire here.

Monday - Circumcision & The False Brothers

Acts 15:1, 5; Deuteronomy 10:16, Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11, 12

What was the specific point of contention that Paul had to contend with?
Circumcision.

Acts 15:1, 5: "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved...But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.' "

This was considered a salvation issue. Of course, there is a difference between the law of God and the law of Moses (Deut. 4:13). The contention wasn't over the Ten Commandments, but over some of the things Moses had written – circumcision and the ceremonial laws.

What was the purpose of circumcision? If circumcision is required for salvation, then there's a whole lot of people prior to the days of Abraham that won't be saved.

Circumcision spoke of the day that God would become human. Circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. Although the initial covenant was made in Genesis 15, circumcision wasn't commanded until Genesis 17 – at least 13 years later, after Ishmael was born. At that time, God changed Abram's name from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude"), a name that anticipated the fulfillment of God's promise. Through Abraham's seed the Messiah would come and bless all nations

Circumcision was a sign of conversion. Even in the Old Testament, there was recognition that physical circumcision was not enough. Moses commanded the Israelites in Deuteronomy 10:16 to circumcise their hearts, and even promised that God would do the circumcising (Ibid. 30:6). Jeremiah also preached the need for a circumcision of the heart (Jeremiah 4:4).

True circumcision, as Paul preached in Romans 2:29, is that of the heart, and it is accomplished by the Spirit. So a person today enters a covenant relationship with God not based on a physical act but on the Spirit's work in the heart. But ancient circumcision was a sign of what God wanted to do in their lives.

Colossians 2:11, 12: "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

Tuesday – Unity In Diversity

Galatians 2:4, 5, 7; 1 Corinthians 12:12; Romans 6:6, 7; Hebrews 2:14, 15

Galatians 2:4, 5, 7. These false brothers came to wreak havoc with Paul's ministry. They came to spy out Paul's freedom and to insist that Paul encourage circumcision of the Gentile converts. But Paul would have none of it. While Peter worked for the Jews, Paul worked for the Gentiles. Naturally, while carrying the same message, both would need to employ different methods to evangelize. Paul was contending for unity in diversity.

1 Corinthians 12:12: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

God has given each of us varying gifts and talents. We all come from different backgrounds and see things differently. Some of have a higher IQ, some are more gifted with coordination. Some sing well, while others write well. Just as each member of the body is different, each their special part to play, and each work together with a common purpose, so do the members of the church, the body of Christ. God wants us to work in harmony and in cooperation.

What are Christians free from?

Romans 6:6, 7: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin."

We are free from sin, which in actuality is disobedience to God's law (see 1 John 3:4). So we are free to live for Christ, unencumbered to love Him and serve Him. (worship thought about Luke 8 -- Jesus calms a storm, calms the demon-possessed man, calms the woman with the issue of blood, and calms Jarius by raising his daughter back to life – one common thing Jesus freed them from – fear!)

Hebrews 2:14, 15: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Humans fear a lot of things. But one thing we fear most of all is death. And why wouldn't people fear death if they don't have any hope beyond the grave? Faith in Jesus death and resurrection from the grave removes all fear of death because we know that although we may sleep for a while, one day when Jesus returns our name will be called and we will live again.

Wednesday/Thursday – Confrontation In Antioch/Paul's Concern

Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 10:28

Here's the story: Paul noticed that Peter was being a bit of a hypocrite. While Peter was in Antioch and visiting with the Gentile converts to Christianity, Peter was rubbing elbows, going to potlucks, just being one of them.

But then a delegation came from Jerusalem from James, the brother of Jesus, who still wasn't associating much with the Gentiles lest they be contaminated. All of a sudden, Peter began to behave differently when this delegation arrived. "You know, they may not understand how well we get along, and I don't want to offend those who are keeping the law of Moses," so he stopped eating with the Gentiles, he sat at another table. And Paul confronted Peter on this. **Galatians 2:11-14**. Should Peter have known better?

Acts 10:28: "Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.' "

What happened to Peter? He backslid into calling people of another nation "unclean." Do we sometimes play the hypocrite, because this is exactly what Peter was doing? And who pointed him out? Paul did. But Paul wasn't immune either.

On his last journey to Jerusalem he got down there where there were hard core Christian Jews, very orthodox about their Judaism. They had accused Paul of giving up nearly everything Jewish. So when Paul got down to Jerusalem the leaders asked him to shave his head, take a vow, and go to the temple and let everyone see that he was devout and that he was seeking after God. The hope was that all these rumors of Paul circulating around would be proven to be untrue. Paul, not wanting to offend, compromised. He had hoped it would bring a degree of unity, but it made matters worse for him and the church.

"The Spirit of God did not prompt this instruction; it was the fruit of cowardice...He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked." (Acts of the Apostles, p. 404)

We're all tempted at times to put on a good air, sometimes for the sake of making ourselves look good, sometimes for the sake of not offending anyone. There are

times when you don't want to go out of your way to offend, and you make compromises in that respect. But don't ever compromise the truth for the sake of unity even it creates division in the church. We need to be united on the word not dividing over the word. One way to find unity is not to say we're not going to talk about doctrine. That's called ecumenicalism – unity despite the truth. True unity is always found on the platform of truth that sanctifies the believer (John 17:17).