

The Book Of Acts: Lesson 2

## Causes Of Disunity

**Memory Text:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning [and/or principle part] of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)

**Setting The Stage:** What is biblical wisdom? Genuine wisdom is biblical knowledge applied. It’s different from knowledge. Knowledge and understanding are the basis of biblical wisdom. Knowing the right doesn’t guarantee right action, but right action is accompanied by knowledge of what is right and is dependent upon it. For example, knowledge knows that a tomato is a fruit, but wisdom knows not to put it in a fruit salad. OT wisdom is equivalent to NT holiness, righteousness, and charity (love).

The basis of genuine unity is the fear of the Lord. This is the principle part of wisdom, which is equivalent to genuine righteousness or love. So righteousness is the binding agent, the heavenly gift and attribute that promotes unity. But if righteousness is lacking then unity is jeopardized!

Last week we looked at when unrighteousness (sin) entered the world disrupting the unity and harmony that God intended for us. However, God expressed His love to us by planning a way to restore the unity that had been lost. Ultimate restoration would come through Christ, but before Christ’s entrance into this world, God chose people to be His representatives of His righteousness. Abraham was chosen, and through his family all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

### Sunday – “Return, O Backsliding Children”

Isaiah 51:7; Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Jeremiah 3:14, 15

Israel didn’t always experience and therefore express God’s righteousness. They didn’t always respect God’s moral law. If you know, experience, and express righteousness then God’s law is in your heart.

**Isaiah 51:7:** “Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, you people in whose heart is My law: Do not fear the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their insults.”

Disobedience led to a host of problems, disunity being just one of them. Obedience led to peace and prosperity. And it’s the same for us today. It’s a spiritual law—defy God’s will, His righteousness, His law and you reap the consequences of doing so; honor God’s will, His righteousness, His law and you reap the benefits of doing so.

Think about breaking the seventh commandments. What are the consequences of doing so? Hearts are broken, lives are shattered, children are hurt and scarred,

disease is spread, etc. What about breaking the first commandment? The consequences of doing so lead to self-worship, creature worship, selfishness, etc. Then Paul reminds us that the payment or consequences of sin (breaking God's law) is death, eternal death. It can't get any worse than that. But obedience brings a host of blessings in its train.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-14.** God desired His people to be an example of what everyone could become if faithful and obedient to the Creator God—a life of peace, of prosperity, of unity. This is seen in the history of Israel when they were obedient to God. But when they rebelled against His will, problems set in. But when problems set in and the people were doing their own thing, God would still appeal to them to return to Him.

**Jeremiah 3:14, 15:** “ ‘Return, O backsliding children,’ says the Lord; ‘for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.’”

God is patient with His people, but His patience should never be mistaken for His approval. It should never embolden us to continue a dangerous course, but humble us, in that He is graciously giving us time to return to Him and His righteousness. God always wants what is best for us. We are sometimes like an animal caught in a fence, wrestling and struggling to get out on our own. And when help comes, we get scared and we kick or claw thinking more harm is coming to us. But after the struggle there is rest, and it is then that we experience freedom. While the animal might run off after being set free, we are to turn to our Heavenly Rescuer and give Him thanks and a life of worship and gratitude.

### **Monday - “Right In His Own Eyes”**

Judges 17:6; 2:11-13; Romans 1:26-30

The book of Judges gives an account of the highs and lows of God's people during the years that followed their partial conquest of the land of Canaan up until the time of their first king. The book graphically reveals the principle we've been talking about—obey and be blessed; disobey and be not blessed. The people often succumbed to the culture around them, which got them into constant trouble. The people didn't experience genuine unity during these times.

**Judges 17:6:** “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (cp. Judges 21:25)

Talk about a recipe for division and disunity among God's people! The unity of the nation was to be found in their loyal obedience to God. But in doing what was right in their eyes they were on the road to disaster.

**Judges 2:11-13:** “Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger. They forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.” (cp. Judges 3:5-7)

**Romans 1:26-30:** “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful.”

Imagine how God must have been misrepresented among the heathen at the time. **How do our decisions and actions affect our witness of Christ today?** When people think about our church, what thoughts come to their mind? How do they know us? Do they know us as being argumentative, always trying to be right? When the community hears the name of our church, what images come to their mind? Can they say, “Here are people who are faithful to God and the Bible. Here are people who not only make a high profession, but live lives in harmony with that profession. These people are making the lives of those around them better. They truly care. They are kind. They are helpful”?

## **Tuesday – The Division Of The Hebrew Nation**

1 Kings 12:1-16; Proverbs 4:5-9; James 1:5

Eventually, after long centuries of making the wrong choices, pushing back on the law of God, on genuine righteousness, God’s ancient people suffered the consequences of their actions. You play with fire you’re eventually going to get burned! God’s people experienced an incredible division.

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, became ruler of Israel. After his ascension to the throne, Rehoboam went to Shechem where he expected to receive formal recognition from all the tribes. Jeroboam was among those who came. He was known as a mighty man of valor, and it was to him that the prophet Ahijah had said that he would be given ten tribes of Israel due to their disobedience. What led to the dividing of the kingdom?

**1 Kings 12:1-16.** Flattered by the prospect of supreme authority, Rehoboam accepted the counsel of the young men to tax the people even more than his father, Solomon. As a result, he lost the trust and confidence of a large number of the people. They would not be ruled by Rehoboam.

**What could Rehoboam have done to prevent the division from happening? What can we learn from this experience?** For one, he allowed self and pride to guide his decision. He was rash, and also lacked regard for the counsel of the more experienced.

**Proverbs 4:5-9:** “Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honor, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you.”

**James 1:5:** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

Genuine wisdom is biblical knowledge applied. OT wisdom is equivalent to NT righteousness. Righteousness is the binding agent, the heavenly gift and attribute that promotes unity. But if righteousness is lacking then unity is jeopardized!

### **Wednesday – Schism In Corinth**

1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3, 4; Galatians 5:15

Unfortunately, the issue of disunity among God’s people didn’t end in the OT. The NT church faced its share of division. For example, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians is an appeal for unity. While in Ephesus Paul heard that various divisions were affecting the church.

**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?”

**1 Corinthians 3: 3, 4:** “For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

Party affiliation caused division in the church. But on a more basic level, people in the Corinthian church were still “carnal,” or were allowing self to take over. Petty issues controlled their feelings and ideas. They lacked divine righteousness in their hearts.

**Galatians 5:15:** “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

An old issue of National Geographic included a photograph of the fossil remains of two saber-tooth cats locked in combat. One had bitten deep into the leg bone of the other, a thrust that trapped both in a common fate. The cause of the death of the two cats is as clear as the causes of the extinction of their species are obvious. When Christians fight each other, everybody loses, and the devil wins. The unity of the church draws people to Christ. Disunity in the church repels people from Christ. Let’s not give the devil what he wants!

### **Thursday – “Wolves Will Come”**

Acts 20:25-32; Matthew 7:15; 2 Timothy 2:14-19; 3:12-17

**Acts 20:25–32.** What did Paul warn the Ephesian elders about? What were they to do to prevent this from happening?

Paul warned that after his departure savage wolves would come in not sparing the flock. They would rise up speaking perverse things to draw people away after themselves. Division would be the result. These words are reminiscent of what Christ said:

**Matthew 7:15:** “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

So Paul encouraged the elders to be faithful overseers, defending the flock from error and teachers of error (vv. 28-31). He encouraged a continual and earnest study of the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God (v. 32) so the weapon of truth could be wielded to defend the flock.

In his Second Epistle to Timothy, Paul also warns Timothy, who is responsible for the church at Ephesus, against errors in the church and godlessness in the last days.

**2 Timothy 2:14-19; 3:12-17.** What did Paul say to Timothy about how to counter false teachers and to preserve the unity of the church?

The antidote to these useless disputes and speculations is to correctly understand and teach the Word given by God. The truths of the Bible must be rightly

interpreted so that no part of the Bible will be set in opposition to the entire picture presented in the Bible. Timothy was also to “shun profane and idle babblings” (2 Tim. 2:16). Trivial and speculative topics were not to be part of his teaching ministry if he is to be considered a worthy and faithful minister.

Truth alone leads to righteousness and harmony in the church. In the end, obedience to the Word of God is the antidote to false teaching (2 Tim. 3:14–17) that could threaten the unity of the church. Obedience to the will of God brings true unity.

### **Further Thought**

*“The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God’s truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples.” (Gospel Workers, p. 483)*