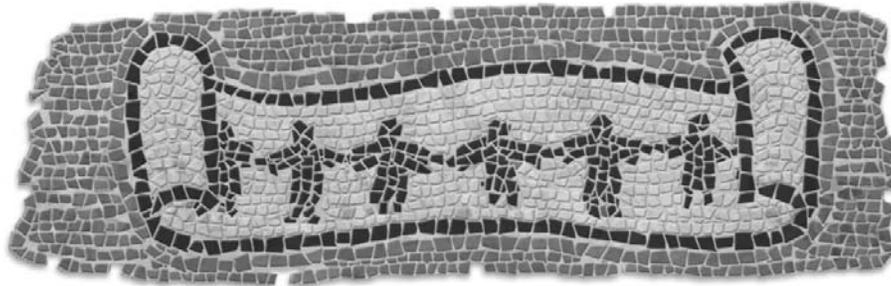


The Unity¹ of the Gospel



SABBATH—OCTOBER 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 2:1–14; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13; Genesis 17:1–21; John 8:31–36; Colossians 3:11.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then make my joy complete by agreeing with each other. Have the same love. Be one in spirit and purpose” (Philippians 2:2, NIV).

PROTESTANT² PREACHER JOHN CALVIN BELIEVED THAT DISUNITY (NOT BEING IN AGREEMENT) AND DIVISION WERE the devil’s best tools against the church. He warned that Christians should avoid separation as much as possible.

But should unity be saved at the cost of truth? Suppose Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant movement, had weakened in his stand for truth and gave up his beliefs during his trial at the Diet of Worms.³

“Had Luther given up a single point, Satan and his hosts would have gained the victory. But Luther’s strong stand freed the church and opened a new and better period.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy [War Between Christ and Satan]*, page 166.

In Galatians 2:1–14, we find the apostle⁴ Paul doing everything in his power to keep the New Testament church united (joined together as one) against the work of some believers who tried to destroy it. Unity is important to Paul, but he refuses to sacrifice (to give up) the truth of the gospel to get it. There is room for differences within unity. But the gospel must never be sacrificed (given up) for unity’s sake.

1. unity—the state of being in full agreement; oneness.

2. Protestant—a member of one of the Christian churches that separated from the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century.

3. Diet of Worms—a governing council of the Holy Roman Empire, a group of German and Italian territories (lands) ruled by an emperor from the 9th or 10th century to 1806.

4. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 9**THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY
(1 Corinthians 1:10–13)**

What does 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 tell us about how important Paul believed unity was in the church?

Paul defends himself against the charge⁵ that his gospel is not God-given. Afterward, he directs (aims) his attention in Galatians 2:1, 2 to another charge being made against him. The false teachers in Galatia claim that Paul's gospel does not follow what Peter and the other apostles teach. These false teachers call Paul a rebel.

In answer to this charge, Paul reminds his readers that he made a trip to Jerusalem at least 14 years after his conversion. We are not fully sure when that trip took place. No trip in New Testament times was easy. If Paul traveled by land from Antioch to Jerusalem, the 300-mile trip would have taken at least three weeks. And this trip would have involved all kinds of hardships and dangers. But Paul took the journey anyway. This is not because the apostles asked him to. This is really because the Spirit did. And while Paul was in Jerusalem, he defended his gospel to the apostles.

Why did Paul do that? Certainly not because he had any doubt about what he was teaching. After all, he already had been proclaiming the same gos-

pel for 14 years. Paul did not need the permission or approval of the other apostles. But he highly valued their support and encouragement.

So, the charge that Paul's message was different was an attack on him. It also was an attack on the unity of the apostles and on the church itself. Keeping unity among the apostles was important. This is because a division between Paul's Gentile (non-Jews) mission (important work done for God) and the mother church in Jerusalem would have had terrible results. With no fellowship between the Gentile and Jewish Christians, "Christ would be divided. And all the work which Paul had done, and hoped to do, would fail."—Adapted from F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle [Letter] to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), page 111.



A division in the church between Gentile and Jewish Christians would have brought terrible results.

5. charge—a claim that someone has done something wrong or illegal or that someone is guilty of a fault or a crime.

What are some problems that threaten the unity of the church today? More important, after we learn what these problems are, how do we deal with them? What issues are more important than unity itself?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 10

CIRCUMCISION⁶ AND THE FALSE BROTHERS (Galatians 2:3–5)

Why was circumcision such an important issue between Paul and certain Jewish Christians? Read Genesis 17:1–22; Galatians 2:3–5; Galatians 5:2, 6; and Acts 15:1, 5. Why is it not that hard to understand how some could have believed that even the Gentiles needed to undergo it?

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant⁷ that God made with Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Circumcision was only for Abraham's male children. But everyone was invited into the covenant relationship with God. The sign of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. This happened after Abraham tried to help God keep His promise to him by having a son by his wife's Egyptian slave.

Circumcision was a perfect sign of the covenant. It was a reminder that the best-laid plans of humans can never do what God Himself has promised. Physical circumcision was to be

a symbol of circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; and Romans 2:29). It is a sign that shows we trust in God more than ourselves.

But, during Paul's time, circumcision had become a prized symbol of national and religious pride. It was not meant to show that at first. About 150 years before Jesus' birth, some overly loyal Jewish patriots forced all uncircumcised Jews in Palestine to be circumcised. They also required it of all men living in the surrounding nations who fell under their control. Some even believed circumcision guaranteed salvation. This can be understood from sayings from Bible times that declare things such as, " 'Circumcised men do not fall into Gehenna [hell].' "—Adapted from C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical [Using Careful Judgment] and Exegetical [Thoughtful] Commentary [Explanation] on the Epistle [Letter] to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1975), page 172.

It would be a mistake to think that Paul was opposed to (against) circumcision itself. What Paul did not agree with was that Gentiles had to have circumcisions. The false teachers said, " 'Moses commanded you to be circumcised.' . . . 'If you aren't [are not], you can't [cannot] be saved' " (Acts 15:1, NIV). So, the issue was not really about circumcision. It was really about salvation. Salvation is by faith in Christ alone. It is not something earned by human obedience.

6. circumcision—the act of cutting off the skin (called the foreskin) at the end of the penis of a man or boy.

7. covenant—an agreement between God and His people.

Maybe today circumcision is not the issue. But what do we as a church struggle with that is almost the same problem?

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 11

UNITY AMONG DIFFERENT PEOPLE (Galatians 2:1–10)

Read Galatians 2:1–10. Paul says that the false brothers “slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” (Galatians 2:4, ESV). What are Christians free from, according to John 8:31–36; Romans 6:6, 7; Romans 8:2, 3; Galatians 3:23–25; Galatians 4:7, 8; and Hebrews 2:14, 15? How do we experience this freedom for ourselves?

Freedom is a description of the Christian experience. It is an important concept (idea) for Paul. He uses the word more often than any other author in the New Testament does. In the book of Galatians especially, the words *free* and *freedom* show up many times. But freedom for the Christian means freedom in Christ. It is the opportunity to live a life of full devotion to God. It involves freedom from being enslaved to the desires of our sinful natures (our unrenewed selves) (Romans 6). It means freedom from the curse of the law (Romans 8:1, 2). It also means freedom from the power of death (1 Corinthians 15:55).

The apostles recognized that Paul’s “task [work] was to preach to the non-Jews. Peter’s task was to preach to the Jews” (Galatians 2:7, NIV). What does this suggest about the nature of unity among different people within the church?

The apostles accepted the fact that God had called Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in the same way He had called Peter to preach to the Jews. In both cases, the gospel was the same. But how the gospel was preached depended on the people the apostles were trying to reach. This verse also suggests “the need for understanding that the same gospel will need to be preached in different ways to different people. Different points will need to be brought out depending on social and cultural settings. This oneness [sameness] of the gospel, although it is preached in different ways, is the basis [foundation] of Christian unity among different people.”—Adapted from James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle [Letter] to the Galatians* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Incorporated, 1993), page 106.

How open should we be to methods of evangelism⁸ and witnessing that we are not comfortable with? Are there some kinds of evangelism that bother you? If so, what are they? Why do they bother you? And might you need to be more open-minded about these things?

8. evangelism—the spreading of the good news about Jesus to the world.



Freedom for the Christian means being set free from the desires of our sinful natures.

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 12

CHALLENGE IN ANTIOCH (Galatians 2:11–13)

Some time after Paul's visit to Jerusalem, Peter made a visit to Antioch in Syria. It was the location of the first Gentile church and the base of Paul's missionary activities described in Acts. While there, Peter ate freely with the Gentile Christians. But when a group of Jewish Christians who were friends of James arrived, Peter was so fearful of what they would think that he changed his behavior entirely.

Why should Peter have known better? Compare⁹ Galatians 2:11–13 and Acts 10:28. What does Peter's action tell us about just how powerfully culture and tradition¹⁰ can influence our lives?

Some have mistakenly believed that Peter and the other Jews who were with him had stopped following the Old Testament laws about clean and unclean food. But this does not seem to be true. If Peter and all the Jewish Christians had not followed the Jewish food laws, a big war in the church certainly would have followed. If so, there would surely be some record of such a battle. But there is not. The issue probably was about table fellowship with Gentiles. Many Jews saw Gentiles as unclean. So, some of them had as little as possible to do with Gentiles.

Peter struggled with this issue himself. It was a vision from God that helped him to understand matters clearly. Peter said to Cornelius, the Roman centurion,¹¹ after he entered his house, “ ‘You know that it is against our law for a Jew to have anything to do with those who aren't [are not] Jews. But God has shown me that I should not say anyone is not pure and “clean” ’ ” (Acts 10:28, NIV). Peter knew better, but he was afraid of making his own countrymen angry. So, he went back to his old ways. That shows how strong the pull of culture and tradition was in Peter's life.

But Paul called Peter's actions exactly what they were, the Greek word Paul used in Galatians 2:13 is *hypocrisy*.¹² Even Barnabas, he said, was “carried away with their hypocrisy” (NKJV). These are strong words from one man of God to another.

9. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

10. tradition—the practice or custom that has been with a group of people for a long time.

11. centurion—a Roman officer responsible for 100 soldiers under his command.

12. hypocrisy—two-facedness; preaching one thing, but doing another.

Why is it so easy to be a hypocrite?¹³ (Is it not, perhaps, that we tend to ignore our own faults? And that we do this while being eager to search for faults in others?) What kind of hypocrisy do you find in your own life? More important, how can you recognize it and then root (remove) it out?



Peter told Cornelius, “ ‘God has shown me . . . not [to] say anyone is not pure.’ ”

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 13

PAUL’S CONCERN (Galatians 2:14)

The situation in Antioch was tense. Paul and Peter, two leaders in the church, were fighting. And Paul did not hide anything as he called on Peter to explain the reason for his behavior.

What reasons does Paul give in Galatians 2:11–14 for challenging Peter out in the open?

In Paul’s thinking, the problem was

not that Peter had decided to eat with the visitors from Jerusalem. Old-time traditions about hospitality certainly would have required it.

The issue was “the truth of the gospel.” It was not just an issue of fellowship or dining practices. Peter’s actions betrayed the whole message of the gospel.

How does the truth in Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 help us understand Paul’s strong stand?

During Paul’s meeting in Jerusalem with Peter and the other apostles, they all had come to the understanding that Gentiles could enjoy all of the blessings in Christ without having to be circumcised. Peter’s action now put that agreement in peril (danger). Once Jewish and Gentile Christians had joined in an environment of open fellowship. But now they were divided. And this perhaps meant a divided church in the future.



Paul told Peter outright that he was wrong and two-faced in his actions toward the Gentile believers.

13. hypocrite—a person who says one thing and does another.

To Paul, Peter's behavior suggested that the Gentile Christians were second-rate believers. Paul also believed that Peter's actions would cause the Gentiles to feel they had to follow Jewish customs in order to experience full fellowship. Paul says, " 'You are a Jew,' I said. 'But you live like one who is not. So why do you force non-Jews to follow Jewish ways?' " (Galatians 2:14, NIV). The wording "to live like Jews" (verse 14, ESV) can be translated "to Judaize."¹⁴ This wording means "to accept a Jewish way of life." This term was used for Gentiles who attended a synagogue (Jewish church) and took part in other Jewish customs. It was also why Paul's enemies in Galatia, whom he calls the false brothers, are often called "the Judaizers."

Peter's actions were bad enough. But Barnabas got caught up in this behavior. Barnabas should have known better. What a clear example of the power of peer pressure!¹⁵ How can we learn to protect ourselves from being influenced in the wrong direction by those around us?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: For additional study on the issue of unity among many kinds of people in the church, read Ellen G. White, "Investigation of New Light," pages 45, 47, in *Counsels*

[*Advice*] to Writers and Editors; "An Explanation of Early Statements," page 75, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; "Tactfulness,"¹⁶ pages 117–119, in *Gospel Workers*; and "Manuscript Release 898," pages 1092, 1093, in *1888 Materials*, volume 3.

"Even the best of men, if left to make their own decisions, will make serious mistakes. If a human has been given great responsibilities, he is sure to do more mischief in twisting minds and hearts if he does not carefully follow the way of the Lord. At Antioch Peter failed in the principles [important rules] of honesty. Paul had to challenge Peter's negative influence face to face. This is written in the Bible so that others may profit by it. This lesson may be a serious warning to the men in high places, that they may not fail in honesty. They are to keep close to principle."—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1108.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Very few people enjoy arguments. But sometimes it is necessary. In what situations should a church judge error and discipline those who refuse to accept correction (punishment)?
- ② As the Seventh-day Adventist Church grows around the world, more

14. Judaize—teach non-Jews to live like Jews.

15. peer pressure—the pressure to become like the people in your group.

16. tactfulness—knowing when and how to say the right thing at the right time.

and more people become involved. What steps can the church take to make sure that unity is not lost among many kinds of people? How can we learn to accept and even enjoy many different cultures and traditions

among us while keeping unity among different people?

③ Why is it important to share the gospel in different ways with different people?