

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2017: *The Gospel in Galatians*

Lesson 3 “The Unity of the Gospel”

Read for this week’s study

Galatians 2:1–14; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13; Genesis 17:1–21; John 8:31–36; Colossians 3:11.

Memory Text

“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2, ESV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Importance of Unity
- III. Circumcision and the False Brothers
- IV. Unity in Diversity
- V. Confrontation in Antioch (*Galatians 2:11–13*)
- VI. Paul’s Concern (*Galatians 2:14*)
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. Read Philippians 2:2. Should unity be preserved, even at the cost of truth? Under what circumstances should we be firm and under what circumstances should we be congenial? (Sabbath afternoon)
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. What does this passage tell us about how important Paul believed unity in the church was? What are some issues that threaten the unity of the church today? Are any of these issues more important than unity? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Why was circumcision such a focal point in the dispute between Paul and certain Jewish Christians (see Genesis 17:1-22, Galatians 2:3-5, 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? What do you think was the core issue in this debate? In today’s world, circumcision does not seem to be a big issue. But what does the church struggle with today that parallels this problem? (Monday’s lesson)
4. Read Galatians 2:1-10. Paul says that false brothers “slipped in to spy out our freedom in Christ (Galatians 2:4, ESV). What are Christians free from? Read John

8:31-36, Romans 6:6-7, 8:2-3, Galatians 3:23-25; 4:7-8, and Hebrews 2:14-15. How do we experience the reality of this freedom for ourselves? If Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles and Peter the apostle to the circumcised, what does that suggest about unity and diversity in the church? (Tuesday's lesson)

5. Read Galatians 2:11-13. Why should Peter have known better (see Acts 10:28)? What does Peter's action tell us about the power of culture and tradition in our lives? Why is it so easy to behave in a hypocritical manner? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Galatians 2:11-14. What reasons does Paul give for publicly confronting Peter? Read Galatians 3:8 and Colossians 3:11. How does the truth in these texts help us to understand Paul's strong reaction to Peter's behavior in Antioch? Barnabas also got caught up in Peter's behavior. How do these actions offer up an example of the power of "peer pressure?" (Thursday's lesson)
7. Very few people enjoy confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary. Under what circumstances should a church confront individuals? (Friday's lesson)
8. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church grows around the world, it becomes more and more diverse. What steps can the church take to make sure that unity is not lost in the midst of that diversity? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Recommended Listening: The entire series by Graham Maxwell on the book of Galatians is available at <http://pkp.cc/MMGALATIANS66>

Did he want their agreement, or did he want their possible correction, or did he already feel about this gospel of his, "that even if a vice-president of the General Conference should disagree, he is wrong, and I will not believe it." Why would he take that gospel up and tell it to the brethren? Did he want to win them to the same view point? Were they having troubles at headquarters with the gospel? Do you remember later on they showed how much trouble they were having when they urged him to show he still was a conservative believer and to take that vow, and it cost him his life? So they were not that clear at headquarters. Was he going up to help them? Well, here's evidence that there was trouble at headquarters. "But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren [note, 'brethren'] secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage. To them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." Now he's added truth to gospel, and he's mentioned circumcision. He's also mentioned the attitude of those who still thought it was necessary to be circumcised, which symbolized a whole different attitude toward God and the good news.

Imagine the state of mind of brethren who felt it so important to find out if Titus really was a true member of the group, they had to appoint a subcommittee to see if Titus was circumcised.

Would you volunteer for that committee? Can you imagine? Ellen White loves to speak of legalists becoming “petty spies”, and this really fits. How would you like to be on a committee of “petty spying” to see if Titus was a saint? But can you imagine the atmosphere at headquarters, when they’re checking out to see if Titus qualifies? What lofty thoughts they were thinking! When you think of all that Paul was thinking about in these marvelous presentations of his, and here’s a little group, working in various and devious ways, to find an answer to this inquiry. Well, “from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me;)” and I said that wrong. I don’t think it came through politely enough. And you know the one who wrote 1 Corinthians 13, which has already been written, would not be rude. I think he was really committed to that. As a matter of fact, that’s part of his good news. You see, if you take an absolute stand on love, you’re never going to mistreat anybody. In fact, you’re going to be very gracious to those who disagree with you. It’s perfectly safe to take a stand on love, and never being rude. You see, things like that are what were not negotiable to Paul. He would never again be rude. So, what tone of voice would be right for this? “From those who were reputed to be something, now what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality.”

We have the same trouble when Jesus said to those pious frauds, “You are of your father the devil.” And that could be very, very harsh. But you know he wouldn’t be. He who was love personified was courtesy personified, and besides, these were his children, and he wept over them when he couldn’t help them. So Ellen White correctly observes, when he said such dreadful things, “there were tears in his voice.” now, what does that sound like? You can’t pretend that! I wish we could say this as Paul did. He was very respectful toward leadership. That’s why he took the vow, wasn’t it? To show he was loyal, and he was a supporter, even though he didn’t agree with them on this matter. Nevertheless, authority did not lie with other individuals; it lay with the truth, and so he is careful to say, it’s his subject right along here, “as far as my gospel is concerned, what they were makes no difference to me.” You see, if a person comes in the highest position in our church, and says that something is so, his position does not make it so. That’s all there is to it.

In fact, when Jesus was here, you remember, on the road to Emmaus, he maintained his disguise until he had led those two questioning disciples to an intelligent confidence, based on unquestionable evidence. He did not want them to agree with him on the authority of his personal testimony, because there were too many people claiming to be Christ, and claiming to have that kind of authority, as the devil does. “I will be like the Most High” he said. We dare not accept something as true because somebody has said so, and it doesn’t matter who he is. And Jesus set an example by not asking people to believe *him* because of who he was. He led them through the evidence of Scripture. Isn’t that true on the road to Emmaus? So how dare we ever, because of position, pull rank on people theologically? It can get done, but it is not safe.

{Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>

Now this time he is relating the knowledge of God to the good news and to the cross. They are all about the same subject. Paul is sympathetic with them, for what could be expected of new converts, when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem were themselves contradicting and compromising the gospel of Christ, as described in Acts 21. Even Peter, after his broadening experience with Cornelius, reverted to some of his narrow views that he used to hold. Paul was moved to correct Peter to his face and in public, recorded in Galatians two. How could Paul feel right about doing that? This is Paul who wrote in first Corinthians 13 that love is never rude. Love never insists on having its own way. This is the Paul who wrote in Romans 14 that he was so respectful of other people's freedom that when there was disagreement over this and that religious matter, he would say, "Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind," and "who are you to criticize one another?"

But when it came to the good news, and those who would suppress it or pervert it, gentle Paul spoke out with almost frightening conviction and power. He even went so far as to suggest that these legalistic agitators were confusing the new saints about the good news of truth and freedom. They were upsetting the new converts by urging them to adopt once again such ceremonial requirements as circumcision and other legalistic details like that. He said, "I wish they would go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves." That is Galatians 5:12, if you want to look it up. You know that Paul would have to be deeply moved to say that about those legalistic agitators. In fact, if you have the *Jerusalem Bible*, you might like to look up Galatians 5:12, where Paul said, "Tell those who are disturbing you and confusing you about the good news of freedom, tell them, 'I would like to see the knife slip.'" Paul was pretty stirred to talk like that.

Well, what is this good news of which Paul was so sure, and which through the centuries has provoked such opposition and has been so misunderstood? What did Paul consider so serious a contradiction and perversion that he could be moved to speak so strongly to the Galatian believers? Through the years I've asked many Christians what they consider to be the essence of the good news. I wish there was time to go around our group tonight and have everyone say, "I believe the good news is this:" Through the years, I think the replies have included almost every part of the Christian faith. But most particularly subjects like the atonement, the second coming, or eternal life. Although, if God is as his enemies have made him out to be, eternal life would be misery, would it not? So whether these doctrines, even the second coming, are good news depends on the kind of person we believe our God to be. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #16, "God's Last Pleading With His Children"

recorded May, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/16MMCAG>*

Now, one thing we need to do is to look back at Acts, to the record of this meeting. They did mention a few more things, didn't they, like abstaining from immorality, and from food offered to idols; though Paul didn't follow that precisely, did he? "But then later, when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face." Why is he mentioning that here? Is he still underscoring the fact that he did not bow to anyone's authority with respect to gospel? But that he felt so certain about the gospel that even when someone like Peter acted in a manner that was not consistent with the gospel, he would correct him, to his face and in public. I think he's still on the same subject, because not until Galatians 3:1 does he really pick up his original question again. "When Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came [from headquarters] he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." Which seems to suggest that the folk at headquarters tended to lean that way. "And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity."

You see, after the vision of the sheets on the roof, Peter had learned something about the proper treatment of his fellow human beings, and he went and treated Cornelius as one should; and he began to enjoy the new freedom. He could eat with Gentiles without feeling guilty and contaminated. But when brethren came down from headquarters, he was scared, and he withdrew. Paul suggested that Peter lacked the conviction about the gospel that he had himself. "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel," see, he mentions that. Circumcision, then, seems to be involved in the perversion of the gospel, doesn't it? And what circumcision implies. "I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" And he goes on with that argument. But not to get too involved in that. Did he do the right thing, correcting Peter to his face and in public?

When an apostle does something isn't it always right? When Bible writers do something, isn't it always right? The one who wrote the Psalms, didn't he always do the right thing? So we can't always be sure, can we, just because it's recorded, that it's right. Unless a voice comes from heaven and says, "Paul, Peter really deserved it. Well done."

This is what Paul did. And he felt Peter really deserved it. And I hope there were tears in his voice. But what is so wonderful is that Peter, later on, didn't hold it against Paul. You would think he might, but as I mentioned, when you come to Peter's second letter he refers to 'our dear brother Paul', and so on. Now, does that sound like Peter in the beginning? When we get to the letters of Peter, the evidence that Peter was really changed is something to read! It

evidently took a little time. But we cannot always assume, can we, that when a leader in the Bible, someone who is being specially used by God, does something, that it is necessarily done in the best possible way. Or what do you think? Is that hazardous to say? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Galatians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/65MMPOGIA66>*

Further Study with Ellen White

In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world's teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us;" "that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." John 17:21, 23. His constant prayer for them was that they might be sanctified through the truth; and He prayed with assurance, knowing that an Almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness; He knew that truth armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers. {AA 20.2}

In this last meeting with His disciples, the great desire which Christ expressed for them was that they might love one another as He had loved them. Again and again He spoke of this. "These things I command you," He said repeatedly, "that ye love one another." His very first injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love. The command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacrifice. The whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacrificing effort. During every hour of Christ's sojourn upon the earth, the love of God was flowing from Him in irrepressible streams. All who are imbued with His Spirit will love as He loved. The very principle that actuated Christ will actuate them in all their dealing one with another. {DA 677.2}

This love is the evidence of their discipleship. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples," said Jesus, "if ye have love one to another." When men are bound together, not by

force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart. {DA 678.1}

Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out. How earnestly the Saviour prayed that His disciples might be one with Him as He is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ and His followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with Him as He is one with the Father (RH June 1, 1905). {5BC 1148.2}

The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. In mind, in purpose, in character, they are one, but not in person. By partaking of the Spirit of God, conforming to the law of God, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ brings His disciples into a living union with Himself and with the Father. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, man is made complete in Christ Jesus. Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ, and of His power to take away sin. {SD 286.3}

Christ brings all true believers into complete oneness with Himself, even the oneness which exists between Him and His Father. The true children of God are bound up with one another and with their Saviour. They are one with Christ in God. {SD 293.5}

Unity in diversity is God's plan. Among the followers of Christ there is to be the blending of diverse elements, one adapted to the other, and each to do its special work for God. {OHC 169.2}

How great the diversity manifested in the natural world! Every object has its peculiar sphere of action; yet all are found to be linked together in the great whole. Christ Jesus is in union with the Father, and from the great center this wonderful unity is to extend . . . through all classes and diversities of talents. We are all to respect one another's talent; we are to harmonize in goodness, in unselfish thoughts and actions, because the Spirit of Christ, as the living, working agency, is circulating through the whole. . . . It is not striking actions that produce unity; it is the mold of the Holy Spirit upon the character. {OHC 169.4}

The golden chain of love, binding the hearts of the believers in unity, in bonds of fellowship and love, and in oneness with Christ and the Father, makes the connection perfect, and bears to the world a testimony of the power of Christianity that cannot be controverted. . . . {TMK 173.2}

The fruit of the Spirit—what is it? Gloom, and sadness, and mourning, and tears? No, no; the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness,

temperance. These graces will be seen in every stone that helps to compose the temple of God. All the stones are not of the same dimension or shape, but every stone has its place in the temple. {RC 273.5}

The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. They are one in purpose, in mind, in character, but not in person. It is thus that God and Christ are one. {MH 422.1}

The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us. It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate. The sunlight falling upon the different objects gives those objects a different hue. {1SM 22.1}

Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold.—Letter 53, 1900. {1SM 22.2}

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all these other writers who have borne their testimony in regard to the life of the Saviour during His earthly ministry? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record, and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's life and work? {2MCP 424.1}

The Gospels differ, yet in them the record blends in one harmonious whole. One writer brings in points that another does not bring in. If these points are essential, why did not all the writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ and do not comprehend things in exactly the same way. Some truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of one class of persons than to others; some points appear to be much more important to some than to others. The same principle applies to speakers. Some speakers dwell at considerable lengths on points that others would pass by quickly or would not mention at all. Thus the truth is presented more clearly by several than by one.—MS 87, 1907. {2MCP 424.2}