

Lesson 3 – The Unity of the Gospel

Sabbath

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

What does it mean to be in UNITY? Was this message just for the 1st century Christian church, or can we learn some principles for the 21st century church??

u•ni•ty [yoo-ni-tee]

noun, plural -ties.

1. the state of being one; oneness.
2. a whole or totality as combining all its parts into one.
3. the state or fact of being united or combined into one, as of the parts of a whole; unification.
4. absence of diversity; unvaried or uniform character.
5. oneness of mind, feeling, etc., as among a number of persons; concord, harmony, or agreement.

Which of these definitions best fits the Godhead?? Which best fits Adventism?? Which best fits our class??

Sunday

The Importance of Unity

1 Cor 1:10-13.

10 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. 11 My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul is being branded as a “renegade” according to the lesson. He seems to just be making trouble for the church establishment. He later accuses one of Christ’s disciples [a prominent church leader] of hypocrisy. Any of this sounding familiar yet??

The pink section at the bottom of Sunday’s lesson asks: “What are some issues that threaten the unity of the church today? What issues are more important than unity itself??”

Doesn’t it matter what we are unified about?? This is from a Christian author:

There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for “in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” {5T 293.1}

Monday

Circumcision and the False Brothers

Galatians 2.

1 Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. 2 I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. 4 This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. 5 We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. 7 On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. 8 For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. 9 James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

Paul Opposes Cephas

11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. 14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? 15 “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. 17 “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. 19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

What’s the big deal about circumcision anyway?? We touched on this 2 weeks ago with this quote:

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God’s law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. {PP 364.2}

Tuesday

Unity in Diversity.

Is this contradictory?

What does it mean to be “free” in Jesus Christ?? Are we “free” to do what we please?? Are we “free” to live our lives without fear?? Are we “free” to violate the “Laws of God” [health/worship/love/liberty/natural laws/giving/etc]?? Are we free to violate God’s Law at the risk of His character of Love and forgiveness changing toward us?? Are we free to violate God’s Law without consequence?? Have you ever really pondered what this freedom means??

Is the drug addict free?? Is the drunk free?? Is the obese diabetic free?? Is the jealous spouse free?? Is the person with a distorted God concept free??

Paul understood the concept that God’s Law was NOT something legislated after sin entered the world, but it emanates from his character; it has natural consequences for violations; and the Earth and mankind were created in harmony with the Law of God and functioned that way until Adam and Eve believed the lie that they would “not surely die.” While Paul didn’t understand anywhere near what we understand of the natural laws and the laws of health, he understood enough to write in **Romans 1: 18-20: “18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”**

Is our, present day, SDA church unified in diversity?? In diversity of culture maybe. In diversity of gender, probably. In diversity of thought, light, and wisdom, doubtfully.

Wednesday

Confrontation at Antioch

This is a familiar story where Paul confronts Peter for his hypocrisy in eating with the Gentiles, except when some prominent Jews came to visit. [Thursday’s lesson shows us this was NOT the real problem.] Could/should Paul have handled the confrontation with Peter better?? Paul himself uses some pejorative language in Gal 2:15 [**15 “We who are Jews by birth and not *sinful* Gentiles...”**].

What can we learn from Peter’s behavior after he was confronted?? Have we experienced any confrontation in our family lives lately?? In our SS class?? At work?? Have we handled things like Peter did??

Thursday

Paul's Concern

Gal. 2:11-14

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How does Peter's behavior compromise the Gospel of Jesus?? The lesson, rightly, states, "From Paul's perspective, Peter's behavior implied that the Gentile Christians were second-rate believers at best, and he believed that Peter's actions would place strong pressure upon the Gentiles to conform if they wanted to experience full fellowship."

Have we treated any group or individual as "second-rate Christians"? Smokers?? Anyone of a different language or skin color?? Carnivores?? Sunday worshipers??

Friday

In the pink box, #1: "Very few people enjoy confrontation, but sometimes it is necessary. In what circumstances should a church condemn error and discipline those who refuse to accept correction?" Any thoughts on this one??