

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Gospel in Galatians
Lesson 3. The Unity of the Gospel

Unity—how people in a church can truly believe the same thing—is important, because Jesus said that the only way the world can be brought to believe in Him is when His followers “all may be one; ... that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (John 17:21). Something He calls “Thy truth” is the only thing that will unite them (vs. 17).

Paul calls it “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14). The success or failure of Christ’s mission for the world therefore depends on that “truth” bringing His people who profess to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” into one (Rev. 14:12). Is that “truth of the gospel” so simple and clear that it appeals to honest hearts with a similarly powerful logic?

Take the problem of Genesis 1: Christ and His apostles accepted that “the truth of the gospel” required sincere, honest hearts to believe that God created the earth in six literal days. People who insist they are equally sincere understand the idea of six literal days to be ancient mythology; science makes such belief naive, they say.

Take the problem of Jesus Himself: when He became incarnate, did He “take” the sinless nature of the unfallen Adam, thus breaking the genetic line of His descent from the real Adam? Or did He accept the working of the great law of heredity and enter the stream of humanity by taking our fallen, sinful nature yet living a sinless life? Here again is disunity; the assumption is that unity is an impossibility. Or is it?

Paul’s plea for the church members in Corinth to “speak [teach] the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you,” that they “be perfectly joined together in the same mind” is not idle talk (see 1 Cor. 1:10). This is God’s ideal for His church, and a little known prediction in an out-of-date book entitled *Historical Sketches* states categorically that such blessed heart- and mind-unity will be realized in the church before Jesus returns: “They will see eye to eye in all matters of religious belief. They will speak [teach] the same things.” [1]

Why does disunion seem to flourish? And how can the church lighten the earth with glory if it is in a divided state? And what can bring the true unity that Christ prayed for?

There is a solution! If God is real and if His Bible is true, it follows that God *will* bring His people into unity.

What today seems impossible, the Holy Spirit will accomplish. He brought the disunited eleven apostles into unity before the Day of Pentecost. They were “all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). That was “the former rain,” and the “latter rain” is promised to be even greater. But God cannot use force to accomplish it.

Ephesians gives us the solution, the key to finding true harmony: for those “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” is the message of *agape* (Eph. 4:14, 15). Such a message tells what Christ accomplished, the pure biblical truth of justification by faith. *Agape* is a different kind of love that listens to each other carefully so as not to misrepresent each other, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the [Holy] Spirit in the bond of peace” (vs. 3). No more misquoting each other so as to win an argument.

The subject of 1888 holds for Seventh-day Adventists (and even some non-Adventists!) the charm of an unsolved mystery. Until the full truth is known as to the history and content of the message, the world church can never be diverted from an earnest desire to know the facts.

The truth is so simple that even a child can grasp it: The Lord sent the “beginning” of the latter rain in the 1888 message; it would have led to the finishing of the work in that generation had it been accepted; and the same enmity against God that led the Jews to reject their Messiah led our brethren of a past generation to reject the gracious light that God sent. This simple A-B-C truth will evoke a response from Seventh-day Adventists the world around, and pave the way for unity to prevail as the church prepares for her final conflict. Dissension and strife melt away in the light of the 1888 gospel message.

Implicit in the 1888 message itself is the concept of loyalty to the principles of church organization. This is because the message calls for repentance and expresses firm confidence that the call will eventually be heeded. Never does the message call for rebellion, or for establishing a new organization or offshoot.

If we do not resist the Holy Spirit, He will bring us into a blessed unity of heart and mind. As E. J. Waggoner wrote:

“Remember that there was no difference of opinion among the apostles nor in the church as to what the gospel is. There were ‘false brethren,’ it is true; but inasmuch as they were false, they were no part of the church, the body of Christ, which is the truth. Many professed Christians, sincere persons, suppose that it is almost a matter of necessity that there be differences in the church. ‘All cannot see alike,’ is the common statement. So they misread Ephesians 4:13 (KJV), making it seem that God has given us gifts ‘*till* we all come into the unity of the faith.’ What the Word teaches is that ‘*in* the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,’ we all come ‘unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’ There is only ‘one-faith’ (vs. 5), the faith of Jesus, as there is only one Lord.” [2]

Christ has promised solemnly that if He is lifted up on His cross, that is, if His *agape* is clearly proclaimed, He “will draw all peoples to [Himself],” and that of course is perfect

unity (John 12:32). If the leadership of a church that is being fragmented receives the precious message of Christ's righteousness, the miracle of unity is as certain as day follows night.

Some day, somewhere, someone will understand the "everlasting gospel" of Jesus Christ so clearly that "another angel" will come down from heaven "having great power" and will "lighten the earth" with the glory of that full-orbed truth. Multitudes who now sit in darkness will see a great light and will come to it (Rev. 18:1-4; Matt. 4:16).

And it won't be only "some *one*" who understands; there will be *many* who are in heartfelt union, around the world, of "every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6). No more theological squabbles!

Those who will understand the gospel and be in union will receive "the seal ... of our God in their foreheads" (Rev. 7:1-4). They will graduate out of old covenant living into the bright sunlight of the new. The old covenant will no longer produce "bondage" in them, but they will "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Gal. 5:1). They will overcome where ancient Israel stumbled and fell. Instead of "crucifying Christ afresh and bringing Him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:6), they will surrender self to be "crucified with Him" (Gal. 2:20).

But must this glorious triumph of the gospel await a future generation? Are there some out there who long to see the victory come now?

—From the writings of Robert J. Wieland

Endnotes:

[1] *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*: Practical addresses delivered by Mrs. E. G. White to the Swiss Conference and the European Missionary Council held at Basle in September 1885; "Unity Among Laborers," p. 124.

[2] Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, a verse-by-verse study of Galatians, p. 37, CFI ed. (2016).

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/w5M9CXdw30c>

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