

### 3. The Unity of the Gospel (4Q 2011—Galatians)

**Biblical material:** Gal. 2:1–14, 1 Cor. 1:10–13, Gen. 17:1–21, John 8:31–36, Col. 3:11.

#### Quotes

- Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much. *Helen Keller*
- Unity without verity is no better than conspiracy. *John Trapp*
- I know that my unity with all people cannot be destroyed by national boundaries and government orders. *Leo Tolstoy*
- Union gives strength to the humble. *Publilius Syrus*
- The gospel to me is simply irresistible. *Blaise Pascal*
- The Christian missionary may preach the gospel to the poor naked heathen, but the spiritual heathen who populate Europe have as yet heard nothing of Christianity. *Carl Jung*
- The glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones*
- The gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate. It is an announcement. *Paul S. Rees*

#### Questions

What’s the specific issue here of the “unity of the gospel”? While we may be concerned about Christian unity, how do we “split” the gospel? In what way were the Galatians getting “in the way” of the gospel? How does this relate to us? How does this relate to the whole great controversy view? How are we “one” with God?

#### Bible summary

In Gal. 2:1–14 Paul continues his explanation and defense, making it clear that he is not indebted to human beings for his gospel. He goes out of his way to show how he has operated, and that those who articulate other ideas are preaching a different gospel. Paul also makes it clear he has been operating with the approval of the church leaders in Jerusalem, although he has had to call them to account on occasion. His main point here is to make it clear that Gentiles do not have to follow Jewish ceremonial laws and customs. Paul carries this further in 1 Cor. 1:10-13, pleading for unity of attitude, and condemning those who say “I follow this one; I follow that one.” As Paul potently asks, “Is Christ divided?”

Gen. 17:1-21 details the covenant of circumcision that the Judaizing party was making much of. Paul shows it was significant then, but has been superseded by the coming of Jesus. Jesus in John 8:31-36 similarly pointed out that to claim descent from Abraham was not the most important thing. As Col. 3:11 tells us, there is neither Jew nor Greek—all are one in Christ Jesus

#### Comment

Two missions, but the same gospel. That sums up the situation that eventually prevailed in Jerusalem, even though there was much contention before the consensus was finally decided. That there could be unity of purpose as they worked in different ways with the different peoples and cultures surely argues for divine intervention!

This example of unity reveals that it is a unity of purpose rather than a unity of method. Paul is to go on working for the “foreigners,” while Peter and others worked primarily among the Jews. (Though Peter himself was the recipient of the vision from God making it clear that the gospel was to be taken beyond his own community).

The real question is “what is the gospel?” The argument over forms and ceremonies here in Galatians shows how easily the good news of God and about God is perverted into something else. And anything but the good news of *God* is a perversion of the gospel.

Paul saw that very clearly. But do we? How do we help people to come and discover the God of the gospel? When was the last time I really helped someone to a more abundant life in Jesus? The Question that really bugs us all. Because it gets under the skin of our comfortableness, invades our comfort zone, and makes us face the reality of this world and what God wants to do through us. Think what Jesus said:

You go into all the world, and make disciples. If you have seen me you have seen the father. I am come to seek and to save that which was lost. Turn the other cheek. Give you coat, and your shirt too. Give your money to the poor.

Invitations to service in the fellowship of friendship—for Jesus calls us no longer servants but friends. Friends in the spreading of his good news gospel, good news that is the *god-spel*, the old Anglo-Saxon term that originally meant the *God story*.

Too much and too often the story is about us. And we don’t tell the right story. Surely it’s time to give up on ourselves, and give back to God. Give back what we value the most--all the world-foolishness that has invaded our lives and exchange it for the treasure that doesn’t rust or rot. Time to preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ, with all he said and meant and did:

- To preach the Christian charter of the Sermon on the Mount, and be one with the meek, the merciful, peacemakers, and the hungerers and thirsters after righteousness.
- To love our enemies
- To not look at the speck in the eyes of others
- To not worry about your life
- To not pray like the hypocrites
- To not do our charitable acts to get attention
- To become the salt of the earth and the light of the world
- To not store up treasures on earth
- To not serve two masters

For this is life eternal, to know... Which is being really alive, with that abundance only God can put there. The abundant life that can’t be hid and which demands sharing, spreading the real gospel.

### **Ellen White Comments**

Heaven is watching to see how those occupying positions of influence fulfill their stewardship. The demands upon them as stewards are measured by the extent of their influence. In their treatment of their fellow-men, they should be as fathers,--just, tender, true. They should be Christlike in character, uniting with their brethren in the closest bonds of unity and fellowship. {GW 495}

Prepared July 14, 2011 © Jonathan Gallagher 2011