

READ Psalm 133

Just as the David speaks of the good and pleasant nature of harmony (CSB) or unity (NASB), so should we desire to live in harmony and unity with those around us which is why I appreciated, on Wednesday, hearing President Biden expressing his desire for unity within our country. In the interest of full transparency and to show fairness to what he said, I will admit that did not support Joe Biden during the election process, but he is now our president, and honesty demands that I lay aside my biases and pre-conceived notions and acknowledge when something good has been stated. I am specifically referring to when the President stated, *"Today, on this January day, my whole soul is in this: Bringing America together. Uniting our people. And uniting our nation. I ask every American to join me in this cause."*

While I appreciate these statements and recognize them as needed, we would all do well to recognize that unity is not present currently because there are many roadblocks that stand in our way. Yet, we would also do well to recognize that these struggles are not unique to our day and time. Disunity and divisiveness have been present throughout the history of mankind, but that does not mean that unity is not achievable. The fact that David writes of the good and pleasant nature of unity tells us that it is indeed possible and achievable.

But how do we get there? How do we achieve unity in such a divided world as our own? This is the question we are going to seek to answer this morning. Let's remember that it is God's Word that is able to fully equip us to do everything that God desires for us to do (**II Timothy 3:16,17**). Unity is certainly something that God desires (**I Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2; Colossians 3:14; I Peter 3:8**), so we can therefore be confident that He tells us through His revealed word how it can be accomplished.

One of the best case studies we can look to on the subject of unity is that of Paul's letter to the Galatians. This inspired writing addresses some of the most major roadblocks that were present during Paul's day and continue to be present within our day, as well. Yet, this writing also contains the solution that led to true and lasting unity among the Galatians and that will lead to true and lasting unity among people of our own day. Let's turn in our Bibles to Galatians and use our time of study this morning to consider Paul's desire for unity among the Galatians. Keep in mind that the roadblocks to unity we're about to address stem from men, but that true unity will be seen as a product of God.

GOD Paul's Desire For Unity Among The Galatians**A. Divided Over False Teaching****1. "a different gospel" (1:6-10)**

- a) Some of the most shocking statements made within any of Paul's writings are found here within Galatians, and it doesn't take long for us to see just how serious the issues are within the Galatian churches. It is normal for Paul's letters to open with warm and friendly greetings which speak to the love and fellowship he had with these churches and brothers and sisters, but **Galatians** is certainly the exception as Paul quickly speaks of his disappointment concerning what was happening within these churches. Disunity was present because there were some who were propagating a false gospel message.

*"I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a **different gospel**— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to **distort the gospel of Christ.**" (1:6,7)*

- b) Just how serious was the presence of this *"different gospel"*? It was so serious that Paul would go so far as to say that anyone who would be involved in preaching any sort of different gospel would be worthy of a curse **being upon him**. What does it mean for curse

to be upon him? It is to say that this person deserves to be damned or condemned to hell! I can't think of anything more serious, but such is the case when it comes to be divided by the presence of false teaching.

2. "as yoke of slavery" (5:1-6)

- a) This idea of a different gospel causing division among these churches has light further shed upon it in **chapter 5** as Paul refers to it as again being under "a yoke of slavery." Paul opens in **chapter 1** by simply referring to the presence of a different gospel, but he will more specifically identify the issue as being that of "false brothers {having} infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus in order to enslave us" (2:4) There was an effort being made by disciples of a Jewish background demanding that the disciples of a Gentile background be responsible for upholding tenants of the Law of Moses. Here in **chapter 5**, Paul speaks of the freedom they have in Christ being threatened by these efforts to force circumcision.

"Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law. You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace."

- b) Let's again recognize the serious nature of what Paul is saying in these verses. Here are people who are taking the pure message of salvation through Jesus as is presented in the Gospel, and they are adding something as being necessary. Paul plainly states that such a teaching would only result in them being alienated from Christ and failing to have access to the grace He desires to give them. This particular false teaching was tearing these churches a part and serving as a serious hindrance to the unity desired by Paul.

B. Divided Over Culture

1. "he was a Greek" (2:3)

- a) Yet, there is another element present within these churches that was contributing to the division and it was that of culture. For those who are familiar with the earliest years of the church, you are well aware of the struggles that were present between Jews and those of the Gentile world, basically anyone other than Jews. Yet, we would also do well to recognize that this can be somewhat understandable considering the history that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. Since the inception of Israel as the chosen people of God (**Deuteronomy 14:2**), there had always been a strong distinction made between them and the nations around them. God continually warned them about becoming like the nations around them in regards to their religious practices and moral codes (**Joshua 23:6-8**). However, that had grown and evolved over the centuries to develop into an attitude when Jews viewed Gentiles with contempt and saw them as dirty, unclean people (**Acts 10:26-28**).
- b) This caused some Gentiles to feel as if they needed to conform to Jewish customs in order to be respected within Jewish circles. We can see this as being the case with Timothy in **Acts 16:1-5**. Yet, this does not seem to be the case with regard to Titus here in Paul's retelling of events within **Galatians 2:1-5**. Here we see an issue arise from those who were false brothers because they demanded that Titus be circumcised as a Greek. He decided against such, and it caused a divide among those involved.

2. "he withdrew and separated himself" (2:1-15)

- a) While we might think this was only an issue among the general population of Jewish disciples, we need to recognize that this divide even extended into the leadership of the early church. Thinking back to **Acts 11**, Peter had to defend the fact that he has shared the

Gospel with the Gentile household of Cornelius. Of all people, he should have been a unifying force between Jews and Gentiles, but we unfortunately see him as being a source of division between these two cultures.

"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party." (2:11,12)

- b) Here in **Galatians** we find Peter being sternly rebuked by Paul for his hypocrisy in eating with Gentiles up until some Jews came. Paul says he *"feared those from the circumcision party"* and withdrew from the Gentiles when the Jews came around. This type of partiality between cultures did nothing but cause a major divide within these churches. Unity would not be possible as long as these cultural differences were causing such issues.

C. Divided Over Sin

1. *"I intensely persecuted God's church" (1:13,14)*

- a) Lastly concerning those things that can divide and cause serious problems is the issue of sin. This certainly was true even within Paul's own life early on in his story as we know it when it came to his *"former way of life in Judaism" (1:13)* Paul is very honest in admitting his participation in violence against the church in its earliest days.

"For you have heard about my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and tried to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many contemporaries among my people, because I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors." (2:11,12)

- b) Paul was there at the murderous stoning of Stephen as is recorded in **Acts 7**. He condoned what took place in that moment, and he even went out of his way in chasing disciples all the way to Damascus in order to bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners (**Acts 9:1,2**). These sinful actions certainly didn't do anything in the way of bringing unity between himself and those who would one day be his brothers and sisters, but such is to be expected when sin is being perpetrated.

2. *"bite and devour one another" (5:13-21)*

- a) In fact, the hatred and strife that was present within Paul while he was Saul the Pharisee is listed as part of the works of the flesh that are listed as being opposed to that which can cause unity as is seen in the behavior is a describe as fruit of the Spirit (**5:22,23**). Those types of actions that cause division among people do so because they harm others.

"Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (5:19-21)

- b) Paul states these things as being those that cause disciples to *"bite and devour one another" (5:15)* Certainly we would recognize that such behaviors and attitudes as these will never help us in our efforts to be unified with one another. In fact, being factional is even listed among these works of the flesh! Not only will these things keep us from achieving unity, but they will also keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God all together!

D. United Upon The Gospel

1. "you are Abraham's seed" (3:19-29)

a) Much of the issue surrounding what was happening within these churches stemmed from a big difference between Jewish and Gentile religious and culture. Yet, these differences shouldn't have been issues considering what Jesus had come to accomplish as the promised Messiah of God. The clearest explanation of this is seen in **Galatians 3:19-29** where Paul explains the purpose of the Law as being that which diagnosed the sins of the people in order to show them what needed to be changed in order to strive to have the same type of character of God. *"It was added for the sake of transgressions" (3:19)*. Yet, within the Law itself there was not the cure for sin. All it did was identify the wrong and then spoke of how those sins could be dealt with until the ultimate sacrifice of Christ came (3:21).

"Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus." (3:23-25)

b) The Gospel allows for all people to have the same access to life through faith in Jesus Christ. It did not matter whether you had the Law or not, life was available through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. This is certainly most easily understood and quite undeniable when we consider **3:27-29**, *"For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."* Absolute and real unity is found in Christ through the Gospel message. It does not matter your culture, gender, or socioeconomic position. Every faithful person is on equal and unified footing in Christ.

2. "let us work for the good of all" (6:1-10)

a) This equal and unified footing in Christ allows disciples to then work together as we all strive to honor Christ in our lives. This is seen in **chapter 6** as Paul puts into practice what it means to be led by the Spirit in the body of Christ. It means that we lovingly seek the best for others. We might do that through helping others to get back on the right track after being tripped up by sin. It might mean helping to carry the load of another when they are struggling. No one is beneath our help because we are all united in Christ.

b) Therefore, we all, without the roadblocks we've previously mentioned, must be busy doing good in our lives for all people when we have the opportunity before us. These churches were struggling because very little good was being done. They looked around and saw people who were separated from themselves because of the false teachings, differing cultures, and sins that caused great division, but Paul is saying that those things can all be eliminated by simply holding to the pure Gospel message that cares not for cultural differences and eliminates sin from our lives. If these brothers and sisters would commit to the Gospel alone then they could fulfill Paul's instructions to *"work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith" (6:10)*

YOU Concluding Thoughts

A. Our adversary desires and is well pleased when we find ways to divide ourselves.

1. As we think about these divisive roadblocks that hinder unity, we need to recognize who desires for such things to be present in our lives. Consider what is written in **5:7-10**:

"You were running well. Who prevented you from being persuaded regarding the truth This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. A little leaven leavens

the whole batch of dough. I myself am persuaded in the Lord you will not accept any other view. But whoever it is that is confusing you will pay the penalty. (5:7-10)

2. While we might specifically identify the false brothers as those who were specifically causing issues, who was behind that type of behavior? Is it not the evil one and the adversary who stands against unity which leads to prosperity within the Kingdom of God? We need to recognize the divisions that are all around us are a result of the devil spreading his lies and wreaking havoc among mankind. No easier way can he find to sow discord than to cause people to divide and make themselves easy targets. Go all the way back to the story of Cain and Abel (**Genesis 4:1-16**), think about what we have discussed this morning, and we will clearly see the horrible damage that can be found when such things as jealousies can cause even brothers are turned against one another. We must recognize that the issues we are currently seeing around us are the results of evil and wicked influences that desire for our downfall and destruction. He is seeking someone to devour (**I Peter 5:8**) and he knows those who are too busy dividing amongst themselves are the easiest of targets.

B. The Gospel has the power to unite us regardless of the differences that others might allow to divide them.

1. Finally, I want us to strongly recognize that the cure for that which divides us today (false teachings in religion, cultural identity issues, and sins) is through accepting the Gospel as truth, obeying it, and living according to the will of Christ. When we accept the truths found in Scripture and don't seek to twist them to our own desires then we can all walk together in unity of purpose and action. When we accept that our cultural differences are nothing compared to the similarities we have in Christ then we will stop allowing society to make us think any group or people are higher or lower than another. When we put away wickedness and truly begin to love our neighbor as ourselves then we can live together in peace and harmony as we read at the beginning of our lesson.
2. Yet, in order to do such a thing, we must all put away from ourselves those things that stand in our way. We must define ourselves by our faith in the Jesus, His Gospel, and His teachings and not allow anything else to cause division among us. There is so much that seeks to divided us in this world and men are often at the heart of these roadblocks to unity, but it was God's desire for His Son to come to earth, give His life, and draw all people unto Himself in unity. This isn't to say that we must all be clones of each other in every respect, but it is to say that we recognize all others are equally loved in God's eyes and demanding of love from us.

Main Point/Conclusion: The efforts of men always lead to division. Achieving true unity is only made possible through the efforts of God which brought about salvation through Christ in the Gospel.

WE

While I can appreciate the words of President Biden, I must recognize that his words, my words, and all of our words that speak of our desire for unity mean absolutely nothing if we are not willing to humble ourselves before the throne of God and seek to achieve unity on His terms. There are too many things that seek to divide us right now, and we know that is exactly what is desired by the evil one and his wicked influencers. Differing religious beliefs and practices, cultural differences, and sin that causes damage to those around us are all real and dangerous, but we must recognize that God offers the better way of unity upon a common faith in His Son and the changed life that comes along with it. May we all not only desire unity, but also be the very people who are leading the charge in doing that which will bring true unity...commitment to the Gospel and service to Jesus Christ.

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