

Hillcrest Adult Education (Fall 2022): Faith in Action

Walk 6: Listening to God – We are many parts of ONE body, and we belong to each other Romans 12:4-5

Walk Objectives:

1. Remember that we are many parts of ONE body, and we all belong to each other.
2. Realize how diverse the earliest Church was.
3. Reflect on Paul's devotion to maintain the unity of the Jewish and Gentile Christians.
4. Practice unity in diversity, identifying ways to imitate Paul in this (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Section for Review and Study by the Teacher in Preparation

The Biblical Texts Highlighting Paul's Activities to Maintain Unity of the Church

Galatians 2:9-10 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. ¹⁰All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along” (NIV).

1. James, Peter, and John suggested Paul and Barnabas should continue to help the poor.
2. They agreed that the Gentiles should be reached and included in the Church.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 “Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ²On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. ³Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. ⁴If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me” (NIV).

1. Paul instructs the Corinthian Christians to collect the money each Sunday for God's people in Jerusalem.
2. The Church quickly became a massive Gentile movement. Jewish Christians continued their tradition, most noticeably circumcision (Cf., Timothy), ceremonial rituals, and food laws. The Gentiles (e.g., Titus) did not have to follow them, except the laws concerning table fellowship (Acts 15:19-20). The Judaizers always interested in making Gentiles to be Jews first.
3. The money is not being collected to support Paul. It was a gift to Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15

^{9:12}“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. ¹⁴And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (NIV)

1. Paul's relationship with the Corinthian Christians was rocky at this time, so he had to defend his apostleship at length (1:8-6:13; 7:2-16; 10:1-13:).

2. Nonetheless, he spends chapters 8 and 9 to emphasize the collection of the Jerusalem relief fund! That is 15.6% of the letter, which reveals the importance of this service.
3. He mentions that they started the collection one year ago (8:10).
4. When the fund is delivered to the Christians in Jerusalem, this act of generosity will prove that the Gentile Christians are obedient to the Gospel (9:13).

Romans 15:25 “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there” (NIV).

1. The Roman church was not a church he planted.
2. Yet he wants them to partner with him because the unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians was that important!

Acts 20:22-25; Acts 21:10-13 (NIV)

20:22 “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. ²⁵ Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.”

21:10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

1. Here Paul says that compelled by the Spirit, he is going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to him there. He says he is ready to die in Jerusalem for unity in diversity.
2. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (21:27-36). Acts 22-24 focuses on Paul’s imprisonment, trials, and defenses. He was imprisoned in Caesarea for about two years. When he appealed to the Caesar, he was taken to Rome where he was in house arrest for another two years (Acts 25-28). At the end, we know that he was executed in Rome.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul was clearly aware of the danger involved with his trip to Jerusalem. Yet he delivered the Jerusalem Relief Fund in person. Why did Paul risk his life? **What was his motivation?**
 - a. Sometime during Jewish diaspora era (after 587 BC) the practice of sending their fund to Jerusalem (the exact beginning date is unknown) became a norm for devout Jews. It became so common that there once was a suggestion at the Roman Senate to ban the practice because it was depleting gold in Rome!
 - b. Paul would not have the Gentiles circumcised (ex., Titus), but he wanted the Gentiles to be accepted as part of the body of Christ. **The next best option** for Jews to accept the Gentiles as their brothers and sisters was this act of sending their money to Jerusalem (Cf., 2 Cor 9:13). That was why Paul emphasized this ministry to bridge the two distinct groups of Christians. Keep in mind that giving

money for the poor saints in Jerusalem was the modern-day equivalent of a mission church sending their relief fund to the mother church.

2. What was **the most PRESSING issue** for the earliest Church?
 - a. Unity and diversity! As can be expected of any new religion in its beginning stage, the churches in the 1st century were diverse. For example, the earliest churches were vastly different from each other for centuries while sharing the same belief in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world.¹ **There was NO monolithic Church in the 1st century like the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages!**
 - b. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (ca. AD 180)
He wrote that the Jewish legalists used Matthew's Gospel only, the Marcionites used only Luke, those who separated Jesus from Christ preferred the Gospel by Mark, and those who followed Valentinus copiously used John only. These heretical groups rejected a diversity of theological perspectives and favored to use only the one Gospel they preferred. Their over-reading would have been corrected had they used all four Gospels.
3. Canonization as a means to bring unity in diversity in the first four centuries
 - a. Canon simply means “rule of faith,” and it refers to the 27 books of the NT.
 - b. Manuscript evidences show that the churches had different NT canons until the second half of the 4th century, and that the canonical process was ecumenical, acknowledging unity in diversity as the canon sets the perimeter of faith.² This means that early Christians did not even have the same Bible until the late 4th century. Imagine theological diversity that was present at the time.
 - c. Diversity is neither relativism nor situational ethics. It is not saying anything goes as the canon sets the boundary for what is acceptable and authoritative.
4. What then was the significance of Paul’s action?
 - a. Paul practiced what he preached (Eph 2:14-22). He could have simply enjoyed being a great leader of the Gentile churches he planted.
 - b. Instead, maintaining the unity in the diversity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians was so important for Paul even to lay his life in doing so.
 - c. Keep in mind that it was this Pauline Christianity that thrived in history.
5. The Restoration Movement is also known as the Stone-Campbell Movement because of the two leading figures of the movement, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell. The two were very different in their theological outlook. Stone highlighted the work of the Spirit. Alexander Campbell stood on the other side of the spectrum. It was unbelievable that they were united in spite of their theological differences. The RM was a unity movement bringing together not just these two distinct groups but also other Christians from diverse denominational backgrounds.
6. The unity between Stone and Campbell in spite of their differing theology and practice was quite contrasting when compared to the Reformation Era in the 16th century. Two leading reformers, Luther and Zwingli, once got together to discuss ways to unite their movements. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful because their views on communion differed from each other. They parted their ways, but Stone and Campbell did not.
7. The following page is a handout to be used in class.

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Westminster, 1977).

² Bruce Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford UP, 1987)

Listening to God

Walk 6: We are many parts of **ONE** body, and we belong to each other. (Romans 12:4-5)

Preparation

Spend a few moments in silence, allowing yourself to be still and remember how much God loves His Church, all of us in the whole world!

Invitation: John 17:20-21

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one.”

Review of Our Experiences – Diversity & Unity

From my interactions with people and the world around me:

1. What experiences have I had with what Paul wrote about (We are many parts of **ONE** body, and we belong to each other)?

2. Where have I seen unity in diversity within the Church?

3. How have I been enriched and challenged because of the experiences?

4. Did the experiences cause me to feel closer to others and God?

5. What might God be saying to me through these experiences?

Reflection on Our Practices

1. What distracts us from our awareness of the universal Church being one body that we – all Christians – belong to each other?

2. How can we imitate Paul this week?

Let's pray together with Scripture [the pronouns have been changed to the 1st person]

Ephesians ^{1:17} Father, give us spiritual wisdom and insight so that we might grow in our knowledge of God [and your Word]. ¹⁸ We pray that our hearts will be flooded with light so that we can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance...the Church is His body... ^{2:10} For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁹ We are members of God's family. In Christ, Amen.