

**Opening Scripture:** [Ephesians 4:1-6](#)

## Introduction

[Galatians 2:11-14](#) addresses division in the church at Antioch. Unity is not something that comes easy in any church.

*How does a church maintain unity?* I have some suggestions. For example, we could organize around a **theme, a common interest**. Lots of churches take this approach - **cowboy churches, biker churches**, etc. Whatever common interest we settle on, **some of you won't quite fit in**. You will still be welcome to come ... but this church won't really be designed for you. **Some may leave** because they are not really interested in that theme, but for those who remain ... perhaps we will have better unity.

There are lots of things we could organize around as a church to ensure unity ... **race or nationality, education background, a particular translation of the Bible, music style**, etc. We could be a church of white, college-educated Christians, who only read the NIV and only sing rap music in church. Now, **some of you won't quite fit in**. You will still be welcome ... but this church won't really be designed for you. **Some may leave** ... but for those who remain ... perhaps we will have better unity.

I have a third, extreme suggestion. Perhaps we could organize the church around **the gospel as it is revealed in Scripture** ... nothing else. *But would that really bring unity?* Think about it. We would be a church of various races and nationalities, various education levels, reading different translations of the Bible, listening to different music (maybe even singing various styles of music in the services). And what about our interests? What if some of us liked to garden, some of us liked sports, some of us liked rodeos, and some of us liked baking? *How could we be a unified church with such different backgrounds, different preferences, and different interests?*

### Main Idea

I want to propose to you today that **the gospel (revealed in Scripture and applied by the Holy Spirit) unifies churches**. If the church is made up of men and women who have faith in Jesus, are born again through the Holy Spirit, submit themselves to Scripture, faithfully declare the gospel, and love one another ... **we can be diverse and still have unity**.

## Context

The letter of Galatians was written to churches that consisted of Jews and Gentiles. They were **naturally divided**. This letter was written to encourage them toward faithfulness to the gospel and rejection of every other message. They were **naturally divided** as Jews and Gentiles, but they were **supernaturally united** because there is one God, one Savior, one Spirit, and one true gospel for all people. **Division undermines the gospel.** But **the gospel unifies churches.**

## A Divided Gospel

Although we do not face the same Jew-Gentile division today, **churches are diverse**, made up of people who would probably not spend time together. **Yet, here we are ...** gathered together in fellowship and love. *How does the gospel change our relationships?*

### Peter among the Gentiles

There was a long-standing division between Jews and Gentiles. God had commanded Israel to **separate themselves from the nations** ([Deut 7:1-6](#)). Listen to how Scripture describes how Jews thought of eating with Gentiles (all other nations). **Peter said in [Acts 10:28](#)** “28 ... “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation...” **When Jesus asked a woman from Samaria for water**, she replied, “... “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” ([John 4:9](#)). **When Jesus stood trial before Pilate**, the Jews would not even go into his palace. [John 18:28](#) “28 Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor’s headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor’s headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover.” *Do you see how Jews viewed all other nations? Can you see how this might cause division in the church?*

**Redemption through Jesus destroys these kinds of division.** [Galatians 2](#) describes that when Peter was in Antioch, he ate with Gentiles. **Read [Galatians 2:11-12](#)** “11 But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I [Paul] opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles ...” This was **not the first time** Peter had eaten with Gentiles. In [Acts 10](#), God instructed Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, A Gentile centurion. When Peter returned to Jerusalem he was criticized. [Acts 11:3](#) “3 “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”” In response, Peter defended that the Gentiles were saved by faith, just as the Jews ([Acts 11:17-18](#)). So, it is not surprising to read that Peter was eating with Gentiles while he was in Antioch.

I wonder, *would people be surprised by the people you choose to spend time with? If someone sees your friends, would they say, 'That makes sense - they are just like each other?' Or would they say, 'How are those two people friends - they have nothing in common except going to church together?'* We would do well to follow the early church's example of devoting ourselves to fellowship with one another, with **no regard** for our differences.

### Peter among the Jews

As we read in [Acts 11:3](#), not everyone shared Peter's view of eating with Gentiles. Many Jewish Christians still viewed themselves as God's people, but the **Gentiles as unclean sinners**. When confronted by these men, Peter **compromised** the gospel. **Read [Galatians 2:12](#)** "12 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself..."

These were some of the **same opponents** Peter faced in Jerusalem in [Acts 11:2-3](#). In [Acts 11](#), he **defended** eating with Gentiles. *Why did Peter yield to the pressure this time?* **Read [Galatians 2:12](#)** "... when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." Peter withdrew because he **feared men**.

Fear of man is one of the greatest opponents of the gospel. We hesitate to share the gospel with family and friends because we fear their response or their ridicule. *How do we combat fear of man?* First, we should **fear God more than people**. [Matthew 10:28](#) "28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." There is one Judge, the Lord. Don't compromise God's word to satisfy men. Second, we should **love people more than we fear people**. Describing our relationship with God, [1 John 4:18](#) says that "love casts our fear." The same is true for our relationships with people. Love others so strongly that fear finds no place.

### Influence of Division

Peter's decision to separate from the Gentiles had an impact on the church. Peter divided the church at Antioch. **Read [Galatians 2:13](#)** "13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy."

The church at Antioch was made of Jews and Gentiles. **Following Peter's example**, the Jews in the church began separating from the Gentiles. **Barnabas**, a Levite, had been a missionary with Paul to Cyprus and southern Galatia ([Acts 13-14](#)). He was a **missionary to Gentiles**. Even Barnabas was led by Peter's example into separating himself from the Gentiles in the church.

**Question:** *How does division arise within the church today?* That's actually an easy question to answer. Division arises because churches consist of **people**. **Division is natural**. *Would we have natural unity if we were a cowboy church?* No, we would be a cowboy church with **people**. *Would we have natural unity if we were all liked the same music or same Bible version?* No, we would still be a church with **people**. The easiest way for division to arise in a church is to do **nothing** - **division is natural**.

## One Covenant

*So, how does a church fight for unity?* To some degree, that is the wrong question. **The church does not attain unity; Christ unifies the church**. Perhaps it would be better to ask, *how does a church resist division?* The answer in [Galatians 2](#) is to **continually pursue the gospel**.

### Paul's rebuke

*How did the church at Antioch address the rising division?* Paul did not turn a blind eye to Peter's actions. **Read [Galatians 2:11](#)** "11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned." Once Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, Paul **confronted** him.

*Why did Paul insist on confronting Peter?* **Read [Galatians 2:14](#)** "14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel..." Paul opposed Peter because Peter's actions **undermined the gospel**. Churches do not **just** proclaim the gospel with our words, we **also** proclaim the gospel **by our unity**. Jesus said that a church's love for one another would be the evidence to the world of true disciples. [John 13:35](#) "35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.""

Notice that division undermined the gospel **within the church**. I attempt every Sunday morning to speak of the gospel, the relationship we have with God through faith in Jesus. *Why should we proclaim the gospel in the church?* First, we proclaim the gospel in the church because although the church is made up of believers, **not everyone here is a believer**. We proclaim the gospel with the hope that you will realize that you are separated from God and can only be reconciled to Him through faith in Jesus. We **pray** that God would lead you to faith in Him.

Secondly, we proclaim the gospel in the church because the gospel is not **just** how we come to know God. The gospel is not something we proclaim **only** to unbelievers. The gospel is how we **come to know God**, but also how we **live** in a relationship with God ([Gal 3:1-5](#)). I come to **know God** by His grace through Jesus's death. I **continue in my relationship** with God by His grace through Jesus's death. I **grow in love and devotion** by God's grace through Jesus's death. I **live in unity** with other believers by

God's grace through Jesus's death. **Every aspect of Christian life is shaped by the gospel.**

### Church accountability

Because Peter's actions harmed the gospel, Paul confronted him. [Galatians 2](#) does not teach about **how** we should address sin in the church, nor does it give us a full account of how **Paul** confronted Peter. However, Scripture does explain **how** a church should address sin. One of the clearest teachings on confronting sin in the church comes from Jesus in [Matthew 18](#). This passage is worth us **reading together**.

**Read [Matthew 18:15](#)** “15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.” This verse gives us three important details. First, if someone in the church sins, the church should **not be silent**. Churches should strive for holiness (cf. [1 Cor 5:1-2](#)). Second, if someone sins against you in the church, you should **go to that person**, not to everyone else. Gossip does not defend unity in the church. *Does this mean you should tell a pastor so he will speak to the one who is sinning?* No, this means that you, the church member, should speak to him. Third, the goal of confronting sin in the church is **repentance**. If someone sins against you, the **only** motivation for speaking with them should be love.

*What if you they do not repent?* **Read [Matthew 18:16](#)** “16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” If you confront someone about their sin, give them an opportunity to repent. For that matter, repentance may not be immediate. If they **refuse to repent** either by arguing that sin is not sin or by open rebellion against God, then take others with you to talk with them.

To be clear, this passage is about **sin, not preference**. I may disagree with someone about what version of the Bible they read from. So, I may choose to tell them why I disagree with that version. If they choose to keep reading that version, I do not have grounds to take a group of people to confront them.

*What if a person does not repent of sin after a group of people from the church confronts him?* **Read [Matthew 18:17](#)** “17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” This verse tells us two things about how we address sin in the church. First, if a church member remains unrepentant, the **entire church** should know about the sin. Second, the church is responsible for **removing that person from church membership**. This is confirmed in [1 Corinthians 5:2](#) “... Let him who has done this [sin] be removed from among you.”

*But isn't that judgmental ... to remove someone from the church because of sin?* [1 Corinthians 5:12-13](#) "... Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." One of the reasons church membership is so important is because membership is **submission to accountability** within the church. If you profess faith, but do not attend church or attend church without joining that church, you are **bypassing the means of accountability** that God has given you.

**Self-reflection:** *How faithful have we been as a church to confronting sin? If you were to review our church membership list, how many people would you find who had abandoned God's command to **assemble** with the church? How many people would you find living in open, **blatant sin** while denying that it is sin?* Again, our goal should never be to humiliate, criticize, or tear down. Our goal is to bring the church into fellowship through ongoing repentance. **A church without accountability has false unity.**

### Diverse Unity

Paul confronted Peter because his actions contradicted the gospel. *How did Peter separating from Gentiles misrepresent the gospel?* **Read [Galatians 2:14](#)** "14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

By making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, Peter returned to the **Mosaic covenant**, to submission to the Law. By submitting to the old covenant, Peter rejected the New Covenant; he rejected Christ.

*How do we know God?* There is only **one gospel**. Jews are reconciled with God the same way as Gentiles. No one is saved by **birth**. [John 1:12-13](#) "12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." [John 3:3](#) "3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Likewise, no one is reconciled to God through **works**. [2 Timothy 1:9](#) "9 [God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began," [Titus 3:5](#) "5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,"

Peter's actions undermined the gospel because no one is saved by being born a Jew and no one is saved by obedience to Scripture. *How do we know God?* We know God through **faith in Jesus alone**. This is stated in the immediate context. [Galatians 2:15-16](#) "15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a

person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Also in [Romans 3:28–30](#) “28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” There is only **one gospel** for all people - we know God through faith in Jesus alone.

## Conclusion

*How does a church maintain unity?* We do not maintain unity by removing diversity. The goal of a church is not that all its members will be like me or like you. The goal of a church is that all of its members will **be like Christ**. The gospel brings unity.

*So, what practical lessons do we learn from [Galatians 2:11-14](#)?* First, **devote yourself to fellowship** within the church (cf. [Acts 2:42](#)). Christian fellowship is based **only** on the gospel - we have faith in the same Lord, Jesus Christ. Refuse to let any other common interest or characteristic determine your fellowship in the church. **We are a family**.

Second, **lovingly confront sin** within the church. In [Matthew 18:15-17](#), Jesus explains the **right way** to confront sin. If you see your brother sinning, **help him** return to Christ. Likewise, when a brother addresses your sin, let him help you return to Christ.

Unity in the church is a sign of Christian maturity ([Eph 4:12-16](#)). Division is **natural**. Unity is **supernatural**. **The gospel unifies churches**.

**Closing Scripture:** [Eph 2:11-16](#) explains that **the gospel has ended the division between Jew and Gentile**. Jesus removed this division by establishing a new covenant through His blood, wherein we are all reconciled to God the same way. **Not by birth, not by works, but by faith in Jesus**. [Ephesians 2:11–16](#) “11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”