

7. Keys to Family Unity (2Q 2019—Family Seasons)

Biblical material: Gen. 33:12–14, Ruth 1:16–18, John 17:21–26, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:11–22, 5:21–6:9.

Quotes

- You can't have the family farm without the family. *G. K. Chesterton*
- Sometimes the best way to keep peace in the family is to keep the members of the family apart for awhile. *Franklin D. Roosevelt*
- As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live. *John Paul II*
- Selfishness is the only real atheism; aspiration, unselfishness, the only real religion. *Franklin D. Roosevelt*
- Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live, it is asking others to live as one wishes to live. *Oscar Wilde*

Questions

Why care about family unity? Isn't it true that each person has to live their own life? Can we engineer family unity, or does it come as a consequence of other far deeper issues? What is the basis for unity—can there be wrong kinds of unity? What does this say about our God who wishes to restore unity to his universe? Is God truly selfless?

Bible summary

Genesis 33 is a wonderful description of a dysfunctional family's reconciliation. It reveals that a truly gracious spirit can win over even the hardest heart, and is an encouragement to "at least try." Of course there are never any guarantees, for despite the best intentions of one party, others can choose to reject/resist/ignore. But in such situations the importance of trying to live out the principles of God's kingdom is demonstrated.

Similarly Ruth's commitment to Naomi and her God hints at successful witness. For why would Ruth wish to choose an "alien" God if Naomi had not in some way revealed something of the truth of the true God? As always in Scripture there is much between the lines, and the story is not just about family unity but another demonstration of God's revelation through us.

The unity that Jesus prays for in John 17 is usually applied to the Christian community, but it is surely also applicable to families. The question is: what is the basis for unity? Jesus prays that his followers should be one. Is God going to "enforce" this unity? Is it mandated in some way? So how does this unity come, and what is the process by which it continues? Only by answering such questions do we see how God's perception of unity works.

Ephesians 2 speaks of the way in which Jesus reconciled us through his death on the cross. Again we must understand what this means, or we can misinterpret the way in which God brings oneness to this fractured universe-wide family. It is not by buying off himself, or payment of penalty, or removing his offence etc. It is God's gracious way, carried out at such great cost to himself, of winning us back to love and trust through the demonstration of himself as he truly is. Unity—harmony—atonement do not come

through bargaining or placating or contracting, but through the restoration of relationships based on love, truth, and right.

Comment

“The cross of Christ removes the barriers that separate people from each other.” Sunday’s lesson. How would you explain how this happens, and why it is so important, not for us alone, but the whole on-looking universe?

In contrast to the “other-based” principles that bring unity, how does selfishness mar and destroy? The lesson makes much of the issue of selfishness, and rightly so. For what is at the heart of sin but this, as revealed in the fall of Lucifer himself. So how do we deal with such a deep-seated internal problem? Can we ourselves destroy our selfishness? By concentrating on self can we remove self? And what does all this say about our selfless God?

Right for right’s sake. The essence is to encourage an internal system of control that does what is right because it is right, and not just because an external authority (parents in this case) say so. For ultimately, children grow up, and will no longer be under your direct control. The tragedy is that some children take that opportunity to leave not only their parents but their belief system, and this happens more frequently if they feel they have been “imposed upon” by their parents in their upbringing, if they have not identified with and personally accepted such principles. Remember that you may win the battle of the moment and yet lose the war.

Unity and family harmony are wonderful gifts, ones we take all too much for granted. None of us reach the ideals, but we can all learn and progress, and make sure our families are the best they can be. Spending time together, living and loving and laughing—this is what we value, knowing that children grow so quickly and will soon be grown and living their own lives.

As the saying goes, no-one dies wishing they had spent more time at the office. Parents need to think about that, and use their time and opportunities with the children well. We look forward to much continued happiness here, and the assurance of an eternal future with God our Father, who loves us all as His children and who also looks forward to a universe where peace, love, and harmony dwell.

Ellen White Comments

The first work of Christians is to be united in the family.... The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home. {AH 37}

The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be—an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love, may represent the family of heaven. {AH 100.2}

The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ. {AH 179.1}