

### 3. “That They All May Be One” (4Q 2018—Oneness in Christ)

**Biblical material:** John 17:1–26, 1 John 5:19, John 13:18–30, John 5:20–23, Mark 9:38–41, Rev. 18:4, 1 John 2:3–6.

#### Quotes

- Unity is dependent on the recognition of diversity. *Barry Oliver*
- In the name of God, Paul went out to keep unity in the church. That’s been very popular through the years. Hundreds of thousands have been tortured to death at the stake to keep unity in the Christian church. Has it worked? You cannot force trust and love. It just can’t be done. It’s the very antithesis of freedom. And Jesus cleared that all up, and the angels realized that that’s the truth. And that’s the greatest protection against hostility and disunity and apostasy and defection in the hereafter. There is not one streak of arbitrariness in our God. He is not exacting, vengeful, and severe. *A. Graham Maxwell*
- Before moving away from the topic of unity in diversity it should be noted that unity and uniformity are not the same thing. Some have argued that Adventism must be united in mission, its core message, and in servanthood, but not in everything. In fact, these persons suggest that many issues need to be decided by locality and even by individuals. A movement can be united without being uniform. Unfortunately, in the drive for unity the General Conference has too often failed to note that distinction. One size fits all is too often the goal. In the process it has spawned disunity among various cultural groups. *N.T. Wright*
- Organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience, but rather, for the protection of the people of God. Christ does not drive his people. He calls them... Church force cannot press the church into one body. This has been tried, and has proved a failure. *James White*

#### Questions

How did Jesus describe unity? Why did Jesus pray the way he did? Does unity mean thinking the same way? Why all the stress on unity? Ultimately, how does unity work? Why is unity so important to God in terms of the harmony of the universe? What did it cost God to bring about at-one-ment: unity?

#### Bible summary

In John 17 Jesus prayed for his disciples and for all those who will follow him: “I’m not only praying for them, I’m also praying for those who trust in me because of their message. I pray that they all may be one, just as you, Father, live in me, and I live in you, so that they too may live in us so that the world will believe you did send me...” John 17:20-21 FBV. 1 John 5:19 reminds us that we are children of God, and yet the world is under the control of the Evil One. In John 13:18–30 Jesus reveals he knows which of his disciples will betray him even during their meal together. The unity of Father and Son is also shown in John 5:20–23. Jesus tells his disciples that whoever is not against him is for him (Mark 9:38–41). Rev. 18:4 is the call to leave Babylon. If we claim Jesus, we must live like him (1 John 2:3–6).

## **Comment**

“The prayer of Christ to His Father, contained in the seventeenth chapter of John, is to be our church creed.” Ellen White, *Lift Him Up*, p.296. Instead of 28 Fundamentals, choose John 17, says Ellen White! Quite a contrast to what we usually hear...

In John 17 Jesus prays for his disciples, that they may be one—and we can apply this to the church. As is often mentioned, unity is not uniformity. We are all unique individuals, with all the diversity that God delights in. We do not think the same thoughts and we see things differently. But this should not destroy the unity we have together in Christ. As Galatians 3:28 states, we are all one in Christ Jesus, though we have different ethnicity, social position, and gender.

We are encouraged to live a life worthy of our calling. Our calling is to the one hope in Christ. In this hope we are united; we recognize that there is no other way, no other future apart from God and his promised hope. Here we see the unifying power of this hope to which we have been called, and how God leads through the motivating power of hope. We also understand that we are to share this hope, especially with our family and friends. Our goal must be the sharing of hope in the best way; not sensationalizing our expectations but putting hope in the best context. Our message must not be based on fear but on love, not promoting anxiety but providing assurance. We are to be a “spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men,” as God’s ambassadors at the end of time.

Only as we are united in this hope, can we rightly represent God to a dying world. Such unity cannot come about by human plans, but only through being committed to the God of hope who leads us through. We need to be true to this calling of hope, being the representatives of the God who wishes to lead all to such a saving hope. In doing so our lives need to reflect what we believe, while our church must demonstrate the oneness that this hope brings.

## **Ellen White Comments**

When Christ’s prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God’s people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us. {8T 243}

Many people may be brought together in a unity of religious faith whose opinions, habits, and tastes in temporal matters are not in harmony; but if they have the love of Christ glowing in their bosoms, and are looking forward to the same heaven as their eternal home, they may have the sweetest and most intelligent communion together, and a unity the most wonderful. {4T 65}

If God’s professed people would receive the light as it shines upon them from His word, they would reach that unity for which Christ prayed, that which the apostle describes, “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” {GC 379}

The brethren will be united in bonds of love, and will realize their unity with experienced Christians in all parts of the world, as they are one in their plans, one in the object of their interest. {FE 208}