

#### 4. The Key to Unity (4Q 2018—Oneness in Christ)

**Biblical material:** Eph. 1:3–14; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 2:11–22; 4:1–6, 11; Matt. 20:25–28; Eph. 5:15–6:9.

#### Quotes

- We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided. *J.K. Rowling*
- The reason why the world lacks unity, and lies broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved. *Mattie Stepanek*
- One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organizations do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team. The first requisite is life, always. *A.W. Tozer*
- Where there is unity there is always victory. *Publilius Syrus*
- As the builders say, the larger stones do not lie well without the lesser. *Plato*
- Unity to be real must stand the severest strain without breaking. *Mahatma Gandhi*

#### Questions

What would you say is the key to unity? Is focusing on unity the best way to achieve it, or is it a product of something else? What ways do we try to require unity? In all the texts in this lesson, what is the central aspect that brings unity? What kind of substitutes can we turn to as ways to achieve unity?

#### Bible summary

Eph. 1:3–14 is a hymn of praise to Jesus, the one who unifies us and gives us hope. We are God’s children, and his heirs (Gal. 4:7). Jesus is our peace, the one who broke down the wall of hostility that separated us (Eph. 2:11–22). We are called to do all we can to keep the unity of the Spirit, for we are one (Eph. 4:1–6, 11). We are not to lord it over each other (Matt. 20:25–28). Eph. 5:15–6:9 provides specific instructions to different groups regarding the ways to preserve unity.

#### Comment

As a church our unity is not based on our structure or policies, but on the true nature of God as revealed in the Bible. What holds us together is our shared experience of Jesus, committed to what we believe, convinced about the truth of God. No human organization could ever do that. Our shared beliefs and commitment is what holds us together, not our human institution. On top of that, even though we have (some would say regrettably) formulated “Fundamental Beliefs,” we still hold to the principle of our pioneers that “our only creed is the Bible.”

Listen to the words of James White: “Now what is our position as a people? The Bible is our creed. We reject everything in the form of a human creed. We take the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit; embracing the faith that thus the Lord will teach us from time to time. And in this we take a position against the formation of a creed.” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861. In 1874 he still maintained, “Human creeds cannot produce unity.” *Signs of the Times*, July 9, 1874.

The way that human beings think is the problem here. We seem to believe that if we can tie down what is really important in words then we can ensure unity by making sure everyone agrees with what has been written down. But this is a false way of achieving unity. Whether it's a creed or policies or "Fundamental Beliefs," human words can never be the substitute to the unity of Jesus. That's why we should be very wary of any attempts to enforce unity by demanding compliance with written statements. "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union," wrote Ellen White. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 15, 1885.

Alonzo T. Jones, said it very starkly: "Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible. They depend for unity not upon written creeds, not upon resolutions of synods or votes of conferences, but upon the Spirit of God which the Saviour promised to send to lead his people into all truth. Hence, while in their conferences they sometimes earnestly discuss doctrine, they never by vote decide questions of faith, and yet they are the most united people upon the face of the globe." *American Sentinel*, March 7, 1895, p.75.

That is it! We depend on the Spirit of God, not any vote or resolution or creed. As Ephesians 4 makes clear, it is the *unity of the Spirit* that keeps us together, nothing else. Human methods have no place in the achievement of unity that God promises. We are called to love one another as God has loved us, and for the Holy Spirit to bring us together. Our attempts to achieve unity by requiring compliance or imposing authority or demanding adherence are bound to fail. The key to unity is God himself!

### **Ellen White Comments**

The unity that God requires cannot be secured or maintained by any human methods. But all who are united to the parent stock, as the branch is united to the vine, will be one in Christ. {5MR 371.1}

There is too much following of men, and limiting the light by men's opinions and traditions. The wonderful truth of God is to be sought out by every mind, and the results of many minds are to be brought together from many sources as God's hereditary trust, and the divine power will work in such a way that true harmony will exist. In the revelation of Christ to the world the necessity of men will be met, and the work of God will move forward with beautiful harmony, as truth is disclosed to the world. {RH, October 23, 1894}

The Lord requires that unity exist in every church, but the policy of consolidation must be guarded against. The workers in our institutions are to preserve their individuality; each is to sense the responsibility resting upon him, while he works under the divine leadership of the Lord Jesus. The workers are to counsel together, and to seek to bring in ideas that are in harmony with the teachings of truth, but never, as long as time shall last, is an arbitrary man-ruling power to come in to take the place and authority of God. {SpM 377}

Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ's school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls. {1888 1092}