

## 7. Unity: The Bond of Revival (3Q 2013—Revival and Reformation)

**Biblical material:** John 17:9–11, 20–24; 1 Cor. 12:12–18; Acts 4:32, 33; 1:8; 15:1–31; Matt. 18:16–20; Eph. 4:1–3.

### 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

Why all the stress on unity? Is this simply to make the lives of church administrators easier? How did Jesus describe unity? Does unity mean thinking the same way? So 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 (9-11), and that they might be one. Then he continues to pray 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may be one, just as we are one. I live in them, and you live in me. May they be completely one, so the whole world will know that you did send me, and that you love them, just as you love me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so they can see the glory which you gave to me—for you loved me before the world was created.” John 17:20-24 FBV.

In 1 Cor. 12:12-18 Paul uses the image of the body as a way of explaining how different parts make up the whole working in unison. The experience of the early church is that “All the believers were of one heart and mind.” Acts 4:32 FBV. As a result they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and could work through tough decisions (Acts 15). Matt. 18:16–20 gives instructions as to how to deal with disagreements between Christians. Paul tells the church in Ephesus: “Make every effort to remain one in the Spirit through the peace that binds you together. For there’s one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope. The Lord is one, our trust in him is one, and there’s one baptism; there’s one God and Father of everyone. He is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:3-6 FBV.

## **Comment**

There's much discussion today about church unity, and much of it is misguided. Attempts to define the basics of unity in terms of a creed have always failed, and we have taken the position that the Bible is our only creed. Administrative attempts to impose unity only end up in the abuse of power and cause damage to the body of Christ. True unity comes from agreeing with and accepting the methods and mission of Jesus, who encouraged us to come to him to find the only way to live and find salvation.

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. As a result, we work towards this hope together, and wish to help others find this blessed hope. As conveyors of hope, we are a spectacle to the whole universe.

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. As a worldwide community of faith it is our privilege to call everyone to the unity of faith that looks forward to Christ's soon return, the completion of the hope as it is in Jesus.

## **Ellen White Comments**

When God's people are one in the unity of the Spirit, all of Phariseeism, all of self-righteousness, which was the sin of the Jewish nation, will be expelled from all hearts. The mold of Christ will be upon each individual member of His body, and His people will be new bottles into which He can pour His new wine, and the new wine will not break the bottles. God will make known the mystery which hath been hidden for ages. He will make known what are the "riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) {verses 28, 29 also quoted}. {1SM 386.1}

Jesus Christ is the one great Unity; he possesses the attributes that harmonize all diversities. And he, the Gift above all others, was given to our world to give expression to the mind and character of God, that every intelligent being, if he will, may see God in the revelation of his Son. {YI, August 19, 1897}

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