

# ***Oneness in Christ The Key to Unity***

Lesson #4 for October 27, 2018

Scriptures: Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:11-22; 3:9-10; 4:1-6,11; 5:15-6:9; Matthew 20:25-28.

1. In this lesson we will discuss the fact that through the life and death of Jesus, God plans—when everything has been concluded—to bring total harmony back to the entire universe. When will that happen? After the third coming.
2. Incredible as it may seem, Paul told us in three critical passages that this harmony will be restored at least partly “by means of the church”! (Ephesians 3:10, *GNB\**) But, of course, it is the life and death of Jesus which is the key to all of it.

**Ephesians 1:8-10:** In all his wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>God did what he had purposed, and made known to us the secret plan he had already decided to complete by means of Christ. <sup>10</sup>This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to **bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Ephesians 1:8–10). New York: American Bible Society.

**Ephesians 3:9-10:** <sup>9</sup>And of making all people see how God’s secret plan is to be put into effect. God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, <sup>10</sup>in order that **at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.**—*Good News Bible.\**

**Colossians 1:19-20:** <sup>19</sup>For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. <sup>20</sup>**Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself.** God made peace through his Son’s blood on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.—*Good News Bible.\** [Bold type is added.]

3. In what way could we possibly teach the angels anything about God’s wisdom? How does the death of Christ “bring the whole universe back to himself”? (Colossians 1:20, *GNB\**) Could this have anything to do with unity, peace, and harmony? How does God deal with sinners? How could God bring the whole universe back to Himself? Read the chapter “It Is Finished” in *The Desire of Ages*.
4. The books of Ephesians and Colossians were written near the end of Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. He had already received hints that he might soon be released, and he was writing to groups that he might have an opportunity to visit.
5. Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire of that time—probably the fourth largest city, following Rome, Alexandria in Egypt, and Antioch in Syria. It rivaled Corinth in Achaia for that position. It was a great commercial center and had people from all over the world living there. It was the center of worship to Aphrodite/Diana, a very sexually explicit form of worship. It was Paul’s plan under the direction of God to bring harmony in the midst of such a diverse membership pulled from all parts of Ephesian society. We now know that

Ephesus became a kind of distribution center for Christianity; they hand-copied documents to distribute to all parts of the Mediterranean world.

6. How does the life and death of Jesus bring harmony throughout the universe? This harmony, of course, will not ultimately be fulfilled until the third coming at the end of the millennium.
7. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. In these verses Paul expressed the idea that every spiritual blessing can be ours through Jesus Christ. He has adopted us, making us heirs of God. He has also chosen us to be saved. This has nothing to do with predestination. (Romans 8:26-38)
8. Some read this passage to suggest that God has predestined everyone; some to be saved, and some to be lost. That is not true. God's plan was for everyone to be saved. But, He knows that not everyone will accept His free gift of salvation. Compare John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:6; and 2 Peter 3:9. While God has offered salvation to everyone, not everyone will respond positively.

In the council of heaven, provision was made that men, though transgressors, should not perish in their disobedience, but, through faith in Christ as their substitute and surety, might become the elect of God, predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will. **God wills that all men should be saved; for ample provision has been made, in giving His only-begotten Son to pay man's ransom.** Those who perish will perish because they refuse to be adopted as children of God through Christ Jesus.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* January 2, 1893, par. 4; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 6, 1114.5; *FLB*\* 157.2. [Bold type is added.]

9. In previous lessons we have discussed the fact that race, language, even religion, but especially culture, cause differences of opinion. Often these differences lead to assorted barriers that keep people separated.
10. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. In this passage Paul was referring to the temple in Jerusalem.

The ancient temple in Jerusalem had a wall of separation to distinguish the sections of the temple accessible only to ethnic Jews. This wall had an inscription that forbade foreigners to go any further, under pain of death. It is this regulation that Paul was accused of transgressing when he entered the temple after his missionary journeys. When Paul was arrested, he was charged with bringing into the Jewish section of the temple an Ephesian named Trophimus (*Acts 21:29*). In this epistle Paul argues that Christ "is our peace, who has made both [ethnic groups] one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation" (*Eph. 2:14, NKJV*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Monday, October 22. [Content in brackets is in the source.]
11. What kind of differences still remain in our church today based on cultural beliefs and traditions? How can these differences be overcome?

**Ephesians 4:1-3:** I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord:

live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. <sup>2</sup>Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. <sup>3</sup>Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together.—*Good News Bible*.\*

12. Paul recognized the problems that were brought about by differences in language, race, and especially culture. So, he urged us at least to be tolerant of those differences. But, ultimately, the goal is to go beyond tolerance to recognize each person for his worth as a child of God and recognize his/her spiritual gifts which will be of benefit to the church as a whole.

**Ephesians 4:4-6:** <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. <sup>5</sup>There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.—*Good News Bible*.\*

13. Notice the seven different elements mentioned in these verses which unite believers. How many of those elements are clearly demonstrated in your life and in your church?

The apostle exhorts his brethren to manifest in their lives the power of the truth which he had presented to them. By meekness and gentleness, forbearance and love, they were to exemplify the character of Christ and the blessings of His salvation. There is but one body, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith. **As members of the body of Christ all believers are animated by the same spirit and the same hope. Divisions in the church dishonor the religion of Christ before the world and give occasion to the enemies of truth to justify their course. Paul's instructions were not written alone for the church in his day. God designed that they should be sent down to us. What are we doing to preserve unity in the bonds of peace?**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 5, 239.2. [Bold type is added.]

14. Paul went on in his outline of what can be accomplished in church members through the influence of the life and death of Jesus. It is not only God's goal to get us to come together and tolerate each other, but also God has given us special gifts which are supposed to be used for the general benefit of the entire group.

**Ephesians 4:11:** It was he who "gave gifts"; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers.—*Good News Bible*.\*

15. Paul recognized that things are not always going to be easy for Christians. Remember that the Christian church was illegal in the Roman Empire, and the time was coming when to be identified as a Christian meant being sentenced to death.

**Ephesians 4:12-16:** <sup>12</sup>He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup>And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. <sup>14</sup>**Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the**

**waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent.**

**<sup>15</sup>Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head.** <sup>16</sup>Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.—*Good News Bible\** (Ephesians 4:12-16). [Bold type is added.]

16. He urged us not only to tolerate each other but also to grow up as children, becoming more and more loving, producing a cooperation which will be of benefit to the entire group. Each of us has been given a gift or several gifts. We are not to be blown about by different notions brought in by people trying to lead others astray, but rather, by speaking the truth in the spirit of love to grow up into Christ.
17. Read Matthew 28:19-20. This gospel commission was not just for the pastor. It is for every church member. What are we doing to carry the gospel to the world? If every Seventh-day Adventist were doing what you are doing, how quickly would the gospel be finished? Has Ephesians 4:13 been fulfilled in your life and in your church?
18. Unfortunately, particularly Western society has been infected with the idea that as individuals we are supposed to act independently and to not be accountable to anyone else. But, Paul reminded us that the greatest joy and peace comes when we live together in love and harmony, following the example of Jesus Christ. So, what spiritual gift or gifts do you have? How are you using them to benefit your local church and perhaps even the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole? Isn't that the goal?
19. Christianity, following the example of Jesus Christ, is all about relationships. God is love. Love does not happen within one individual; it happens in our relationships with others. We need to relate to God through Jesus Christ and to others around us, especially in the church.

**Ephesians 5:15-21:** <sup>15</sup> So be careful how you live. Don't live like ignorant people, but like wise people. <sup>16</sup>Make good use of every opportunity you have, because these are evil days. <sup>17</sup>Don't be fools, then, but try to find out what the Lord wants you to do.

<sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, which will only ruin you; instead, be filled with the Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Speak to one another with the words of psalms, hymns, and sacred songs; sing hymns and psalms to the Lord with praise in your hearts. <sup>20</sup>In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, always give thanks for everything to God the Father.

#### Wives and Husbands

<sup>21</sup> Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.—*Good News Bible.\**

20. Notice that Paul recognized that submission to others within the church community comes about because we are filled with the Spirit—not the spirits that come out of a bottle, but rather, the Holy Spirit that comes down from God. Harmony throughout the universe will

be possible only when everyone is willing to be humble and thoughtful of others.

21. Read Ephesians 5:22-6:9. In these verses Paul went on to describe the kind of relationships which should exist between husbands and wives, children and parents, even slaves and masters—which in our day would include bosses and employees. If each of these relationships were infused with the love of Christ, what an incredible difference it would make in our church communities and in the world.

**If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up.** It is our privilege to lay this burden at [190] the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this.

... Christ recognized no distinction of nationality or rank or creed. The scribes and Pharisees desired to make a local and a national benefit of all the gifts of heaven and to exclude the rest of God's family in the world. **But Christ came to break down every wall of partition.** He came to show that His gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.

**The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God.** No question of policy influenced His movements. He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the waters of life.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 9, 189.4, 190.4-191.1. [Bold type is added.]

22. These powerful words point out how important it is that we lay aside our selfishness and our egocentricity and instead practice the humility and submission demonstrated by Jesus. How can we do that? In the life of Christ, what demonstrated His humility? Can we live together in harmony even when we do not agree on everything?
23. Is it clear in our minds why the life and death of Jesus make it possible to live together in harmony?
24. What has Christ death done for us? Is there more than just “buying us a ticket to heaven”?
- (1) It demonstrated convincingly that sin leads to death, that the Devil has lied to us, and that God's way is the only safe way to live.
  - (2) By His life and His death, Christ demonstrated the truth about God's character and government. God is not just a Forgiver; He is a Healer.
  - (3) Jesus demonstrated that God is forgiveness Personified. He forgave those men who were nailing Him to the cross even though they had not asked for it. (Luke 22:34)
  - (4) He demonstrated what we must become if we are to be saved. His life showed us how to live. His life and His death give us a choice: We can choose to live a life like His, or we

will die a death like His—separated from God.

25. The life and death of Jesus Christ are not only for the purpose of providing salvation for sinful human beings but also to give us direction and the ability to live Christ-like lives today. We need to learn how to maintain an ongoing connection with Christ on a daily basis. Christ has not only promised us every spiritual blessing, but also He promised adoption into the family of heaven, forgiveness, redemption, and healing to all our relationships. What more could we ask?
26. When discussing the problems that we face in our local church communities, we often focus on doctrine and different understandings of Christian beliefs. But, unity in Jesus includes much more than just doctrinal unity. In fact, that is not His primary focus. God's plan is for us to follow the example of Jesus in our lives which will, in turn, lead us into total harmony with our fellow Christians who are following the example of Jesus in their lives.
27. The great controversy did not begin on this earth. It started in heaven next to the throne of God when Lucifer, which means Light-bearer, began to think rebellious thoughts. So, God's plan must include a restoration of harmony throughout the universe. Of course, we are now the main focus of the rebellion against His kingdom. Through the life and death of Jesus, the universe has already been restored to harmony. They are just waiting for that harmony to be restored here on this earth.
28. Do you think the angels have ever questioned the wisdom of God's plan for making this earth His future headquarters? Why would He want to do that? Is it fair to say that the great controversy was won on this planet? God will make sure it never happens again.
29. In Ephesians 4-6, Paul described the steps, the attitudes, and the actions which will be necessary to develop and maintain Christian unity. Those attributes include humility (Ephesians 4:2), gentleness (Ephesians 4:2), patience (Ephesians 4:2), truthfulness (Ephesians 4:25), love (Ephesians 5:1), submission (Ephesians 5:22-23), and obedience (Ephesians 6). Are we ready for this?
30. Read John 15:1-17. Jesus Himself also dealt with the problems of disunity as recorded by John. He spoke about Himself as a vine to which we must be connected if we are going to have life in Christ. Every member of the church is supposed to be a part of that flourishing vine.

While the graft is outwardly united with the vine, there may be no vital connection. Then there will be no growth or fruitfulness. So there may be an apparent connection with Christ without a real union with Him by faith. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the character and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 676.5.

31. In what ways has Christ improved your relationships and removed barriers between you and others? Read Matthew 7:21-23 and Matthew 10:5-10.

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