

Oneness in Christ Images of Unity

Lesson #6 for November 10, 2018

Scriptures: 1 Peter 2:9; Exodus 19:5-6; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 12:12-26; John 10:1-11; Psalm 23.

1. The use of illustrations and images is a time-honored teaching technique. The Bible is filled with images and symbols that point to things greater than themselves. The whole sacrificial system introduced at the gates of Eden pointed to the reality of Jesus and the entire plan of salvation. Jesus taught using many parables.
2. Think of some of the other common illustrations used in Scripture. The Lamb is an example of Jesus Christ. The Wind represented the Holy Spirit, and Oil represented the Holy Spirit.
3. So, what biblical images describe the kind of unity that God wants in His church? Sometimes, we focus on individuals. We talk about how we as individuals need to represent Christ. But, what about the church as a whole? Shouldn't the church as a whole represent Christ? What does your community think of the Seventh-day Adventist Church based on what your church is doing? Look at some very important passages in Scripture that illustrate this point.

1 Peter 2:9: But you are the **chosen race**, the **King's priests**, the **holy nation**, **God's own people**, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvellous light.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 Peter 2:9). New York: American Bible Society.

Exodus 19:5-6: ⁵ “Now, if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be **my own people**. The whole earth is mine, but you will be **my chosen people**, ⁶a people dedicated to me alone, and you will serve me as **priests**.”—*Good News Bible*.*

Deuteronomy 4:20: ²⁰ “But you are the people he rescued from Egypt, that blazing furnace. He brought you out to make you **his own people**, as you are today.”—*Good News Bible*.*

Deuteronomy 7:6: “Do this because **you belong to the LORD your God**. From all the peoples on earth **he chose you** to be **his own special people**.”—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type and italic type are added.]

4. Do we look and act as if we are God's chosen people? Are we always ready to serve as priests to the world? Are we willing and ready to accept God's covenant promises?
5. Certainly, God will be faithful to His side of the covenant, that is, His promise to us.

Exodus 34:6-7: ⁶The LORD then passed in front of him and called out, “I, the LORD, am a God who is full of compassion and pity, who is not easily angered and who shows great love and faithfulness. ⁷I keep my promise for thousands of generations and forgive evil and sin; but I will not fail to punish children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents.”—*Good News Bible*.*

The commentary adds:

God acquired the church as His own special possession in order that its members might reflect His precious traits of character in their own lives and proclaim His goodness and mercy to all men.—F. D. Nichol, editor, in article regarding *praises* in 1 Peter 2:10, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 7, 562.

6. So, why did God choose the Israelites to be His special people?

Deuteronomy 7:6-8: ⁶ “Do this because you belong to the LORD your God. From all the peoples on earth he chose you to be his own special people.

⁷ “The LORD did not love you and choose you because you outnumbered other peoples; you were the smallest nation on earth. ⁸But the LORD loved you and wanted to keep the promise that he made to your ancestors. That is why he saved you by his great might and set you free from slavery to the king of Egypt.”—*Good News Bible*.*

7. We know that Abraham is known as the father of the faithful. Were the children of Israel chosen just because of him? Moses assured them that God had made a promise to their ancestors. Who are the Christians’ ancestors? Can we claim Jesus Himself and the disciples as our *ancestors in Christ*?
8. There are certainly no “holy nations” in our world today. Leaders of some nations may claim that they lead God’s holy nation. Some nations are perhaps closer to that designation than others; but, none is close. So, where is this holy nation?
9. How does it impact your day-by-day behavior to know that you are one of the people of God? First of all, we need to understand that winning the great controversy was done by God Himself. We were not there, and we had no part in that victory. So, what is God’s part? And what is our part? God won the great controversy at Calvary 2000 years ago. Even though we did not have any part in that, God has asked us to understand and share that good news with the world. Do we have the correct understanding of the message?
10. In 1 Peter 2:5, Christians are described as *living stones*. What does that mean?
- 1 Peter 2:5:** Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.—*Good News Bible*.*
11. Perhaps, Peter was thinking of Paul’s discussion in Ephesians 2:19-22.
- Ephesians 2:19-22:** ¹⁹ So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of the family of God. ²⁰**You, too, are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself.** ²¹He is the one who holds the whole building together and makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord. ²²**In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.**—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type is added.]
12. So, what are the implications of being built into a sacred temple? Notice that Paul talked not only about an important building, a “sacred temple,” but also he described that temple as being made up of living people.
13. So, what does it mean to recognize that Jesus Himself is the Foundation or the Chief Cornerstone of that building? Is Matthew 16:18-20 a contradiction to that?

1 Corinthians 3:11: For God has already placed Jesus Christ as **the one and only foundation**, and no other foundation can be laid.—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type is added.]

14. What does it mean to suggest that we are part of the *household of God*? When someone says the word *home*, what does that imply to you? We think of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters. What kind of relationship develops between individuals who grow up in the same home? Many stories could be told about the incredible loyalty that members of a home have demonstrated toward other members of the same family.

15. Do we feel a loyalty to other members of the church community as we should? We need to remember that we are related to every other member in our church and even in the larger worldwide church not only through our common ancestors Adam and Noah but also by being born again in the new birth of Jesus Christ.

16. Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17: ¹⁶ Surely you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you! ¹⁷ **So if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.** For God's temple is holy, and you yourselves are his temple.—*Good News Bible*.*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ¹⁹ Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; ²⁰ he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God's glory.—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type is added.]

17. What do you think Paul had in mind when he referred to the Corinthians with their squabbles, misunderstandings, and sins as *the temple of the Holy Spirit*? If anyone either from inside the church or from outside it tries to tear down the temple of God, how should we respond? Shouldn't we feel like other church members are our brothers and sisters in Christ? We need to defend the church by speaking the truth.

18. So, from where do conflicts within the church come? Could conflicts within the church destroy God's temple? Paul talked about envy, strife, and divisions. (1 Corinthians 3:2) There were certainly plenty of those in the church at Corinth.

19. As we know from our previous studies in the book of Acts, Paul wrote a very strong letter to the Corinthians after they rebuked and rebuffed him following a second brief visit there. That very strong letter may be what we find in 2 Corinthians 10-13. Is it time for God to write a very blunt letter to us? Or, has He already written that to us in Revelation 14:6-12?

20. Repeatedly in the New Testament, the church is referred to as *the body of Christ*. That is spelled out in great detail in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

1 Corinthians 12:12-26: ¹² Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. ¹³ In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.

¹⁴ For the body itself is not made up of only one part, but of many parts. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not

keep it from being a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? ¹⁸As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. ¹⁹There would not be a body if it were all only one part! ²⁰As it is, there are many parts but one body.

²¹ So then, the eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" Nor can the head say to the feet, "Well, I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, we cannot do without the parts of the body that seem to be weaker; ²³and those parts that we think aren't worth very much are the ones which we treat with greater care; while the parts of the body which don't look very nice are treated with special modesty, ²⁴which the more beautiful parts do not need. God himself has put the body together in such a way as to give greater honour to those parts that need it. ²⁵And so there is no division in the body, but all its different parts have the same concern for one another. ²⁶If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness.—*Good News Bible** (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

21. When a baby is born, the first thing everyone wants to know is if the baby is complete and normal. Even a small abnormality in any part of the body is considered to be a disaster. What should that teach us about the church? Not everyone can be the same part of the "body." Not everyone could be the head. Every part of the body has its designated use. And if it were possible for the individual parts of the body to speak, they would praise each other for faithfully doing what they were supposed to do.

Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 conveys the profound reality that authentic Christian unity is not just *in* diversity, and certainly not *despite* diversity, but rather *through* diversity. We should not be surprised that it is the Holy Spirit who is the source of these expressions of diversity. Just as the human body is both incredibly unified and amazingly diverse, so ideally is the body of Christ, which through this diversity expresses the completeness and richness of the body of Christ.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, November 7. [Italic type is in the source.]

22. So, how do we understand those words? If we are, indeed, God's final end-time remnant church, we need to be reaching out to every part of the world. No single individual or single cultural group could possibly do that. We need people of all languages, nationalities, tribes, cultures, etc. to help us finish this work. How many of us can speak all languages? Every one of us is dependent upon what Christ has done for us for salvation. If we recognize this common factor, we should be willing to work together as a single body.
23. Another image that is used very effectively in the Bible is the image of the shepherd with the sheep. See John 10:1-11. Jesus called Himself not only the Shepherd but also the Gate to the sheepfold. What is implied by those two images? Middle Eastern shepherds lead their sheep; they do not drive them. The sheep follow because they recognize the voice of their shepherd. The shepherd goes ahead and smooths the path, removing hazards and making sure that it is safe for the sheep to follow. Christ has been through everything for us. Could we ever claim that we have faced difficulties that He has not faced? Could we ever claim that He is not an adequate Shepherd?
24. Christ also described Himself as the *Gate*. What does that mean? In small Middle Eastern

communities, there is sometimes a single sheepfold where sheep of multiple shepherds are kept together. There is only one entrance, and that entrance is usually guarded. Thieves might try to climb over the back fence in one way or another to steal sheep. But, the shepherd comes to the gate, calls his sheep, and the sheep that belong to him follow him. If we are God's true sheep, we will recognize His voice by reading His Word.

25. We need to constantly remember that Christ gave His life for us.
26. Are you happy to be called *sheep*? Sheep are helpless and defenseless creatures. They have no horns or fangs with which to defend themselves or to attack a potential enemy. When facing danger, they often encircle themselves so their faces are inside the circle and their woolly backsides are facing outwards. That is the least vulnerable part of them. Huddling together is their safety mechanism. Does that tell us anything?
27. Often, a shepherd discovers that one of his sheep has wandered off. The shepherd will go and search almost endlessly to find that lost sheep, especially if it is a lamb. He then might need to carry that lamb home on his shoulders.
28. How important is it for us as Christians to follow the voice of our Shepherd? Are we daily listening to God's Word? And to the advice of our Shepherd?
29. As we know, the church has all kinds of problems. At one point, Ellen White was led to say:

The church, enfeebled and defective, needing to be reprov'd, warn'd, and counseled, is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard. The world is a workshop in which, through the cooperation of human and divine agencies, Jesus is making experiments by His grace and divine mercy upon human hearts.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* September 5, 1893, par. 6; *Testimonies to Ministers** 49.1-50.0; *Counsels to the Church** 240.3; *LDE** 52.2. [Bold type is added.]

30. But, enfeebled and defective as we may be, we have a faithful Savior. He gave all for us.

The soul that has given himself to Christ is more precious in His sight than the whole world. **The Saviour would have passed through the agony of Calvary that one might be saved in His kingdom.** He will never abandon one for whom He has died. Unless His followers choose to leave Him, He will hold them fast.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 480.5. [Bold type is added.]

Jesus would have died just for you!

31. We are told, "God so loved the world." (John 3:16, *NKJV**) Do we understand the implications of that?

"Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again." That is, **My Father has so loved you, that [484] He even loves Me more for giving My life to redeem you.** In becoming your substitute and surety, by surrendering My life, by taking your liabilities, your transgressions, I am endeared to My Father.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 483.5-484.0. [Bold type is added.]

32. If you travel through the Middle East, almost every ancient city will have the ruins of a fairly impressive temple structure of some kind. Those temples were built to honor pagan gods

and sometimes even to honor Caesars. Are we recognized as God's temple today?

33. But, the temple in Jerusalem, impressive as it was in the days of Solomon, as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and again in the days of Jesus has been completely destroyed. There is no central temple erected in honor of God. There is no place in the world to which we need to make a pilgrimage to worship Him. Instead, God chooses to make a temple out of each of His children. God has a living temple, and it is scattered all over the world.
34. We have reviewed several images from Scripture. Do you have a favorite image from Scripture? It is interesting to note that each Member of the Godhead is involved in one or more of the symbols. We are called the *people of God*, the *household of God*, the *temple of the Holy Spirit*, and the *body of Christ*. Is that God's way of just spreading out the credit for what is being done to build up His church? Or, is there a specific reason why some images point to God while others point to the Holy Spirit and still others point to Christ?
35. As we have repeatedly emphasized, unity is our focus. What good would part of a house be? Or, part of a temple? Or, especially, a part of a body? How safe are sheep if they are by themselves?
36. Do we recognize the necessity of diversity in God's true church? Do we value that diversity? Do we understand the different contributions that each person can make to the whole?
37. There are many ways in which our individual experiences of life can illustrate some of the images that we have studied in this lesson. The story is told about a young woman who had an education as a nurse and traveled to work in another country. At first, everything seemed strange. A variety of people from different countries worked with her. But, after a while, their common challenges at work brought them closer and closer together. Each day as they celebrated the healings and mourned together the deaths at the hospital, they grew closer to each other. Their common experiences soon made them close friends.
38. Can we learn something from such a story about how we should work as a church?
39. We know that God has called us individually to represent Him in our daily lives. Is there a different sense in which the church as a collective body is supposed to represent God? Does your church clearly represent God to the community in which you live? Does the community recognize that?
40. It is interesting to note that some of the ancient Greek and Roman politicians talked about the state as being a body. Of course, to them it meant that the politicians and the wealthy were to be the head while the poor and lower classes were to serve them. Paul's picture of a unified, mutually-dependent body was very different. All the parts of the body are there to support the brain, keep the brain functioning optimally, and carry it around!
41. What new approaches or new ideas can you think of to better represent God individually and as a church?

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Last Modified: September 17, 2018

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