

Oneness in Christ Unity in Faith

Lesson #8 for November 24, 2018

Scriptures: Acts 4:8-12; 1:11; Matthew 25:1-13; Hebrews 9:11-12; Exodus 20:8-11; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54.

1. One of the major factors that holds a church together is having a common understanding of core beliefs.
2. There have been times in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when this became a serious issue. For example, in 1888, Adventists had serious disagreements at the General Conference session held at Minneapolis that year over: (1) The meaning of the 10 horns of prophecy described in Daniel 7, (2) *Justification by faith*, and (3) The law discussed in Galatians 3:19-24. To further understand how serious those issues were and what implications came out of them, see *Selected Messages*, Book 1, 233-235.
3. Ellen White wept and deplored the differences of opinion that showed themselves at those meetings.
4. Is it possible that we will always agree on everything? No. But, we need to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. How is that possible? If we would all follow the example of Jesus, there would be no problem. However, there were times when even Jesus found it necessary to speak very harsh words to His enemies. See John 8:12-59, especially John 8:44. These were the words of Jesus to the Jewish Sanhedrin.
5. Unfortunately, it is natural for us as human beings to assume that our favorite beliefs are essential and that everyone should agree with us. The two sides in 1888 believed that they were arguing over the core beliefs of the church. Ellen White responded to say that they were not arguing over any of the old landmarks or pillars.
6. It is also unfortunate in some respects that because the church leadership—located in Battle Creek—felt that Ellen White had been too seriously influenced by those from the West Coast, they placed a call for her to go to Australia. Fortunately for us, while there she wrote the books *The Desire of Ages*, *Steps to Christ*, and *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*.
7. Seventh-day Adventism is known in many parts of the world as the church that follows the Bible most closely. Surely, that should be a defining characteristic of God's end-time remnant church.
8. All of the sermons by the disciples and apostles that are recorded in the New Testament focused on Jesus Christ.
9. What are we supposed to learn from the life and death of Jesus? **In the broadest possible context, we can say that the life and death of Jesus give us a choice. We can choose to live a life patterned after the life He lived; or, we will die the death which He died—separated from God.** Thus, the life and death of Jesus—giving us the answers to the most important questions in the great controversy and showing us that Satan was wrong in all of his accusations against God—makes it possible for us to approach the Father, once again. This process is sometimes called *atonement* which is an Old English word that originally meant at-one-ment. Clearly, this means unity or agreement.
10. So, where in the Bible would you look to get the clearest explanation of why Jesus had to

die? Romans 3:24-26 is the only place in Scripture where one of the Bible writers intentionally tried to explain why Jesus had to die.

Romans 3:24-26: ²⁴But by the free gift of God's grace all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. ²⁵⁻²⁶God offered him, so that by his blood he should become the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him. **God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Romans 3:24-26). New York: American Bible Society. [Bold type is added.]

11. It is fascinating to notice that Paul said three times that the purpose of the death of Jesus was to demonstrate the righteousness of God before he finally mentioned that God can put right those of us who believe in Jesus. Who has accused God? What does that imply? Could it be that there is something more to the plan of salvation than *our* salvation? Many people think the plan of salvation is all about how *they* can be saved.
12. Read 1 John 2:2; 4:9-10; and 1 Peter 2:21-24. These texts and many others in the Bible focus on what Christ has done for us. But, we must recognize that the purpose of Christ's coming and dying was not just so that we can be forgiven again and again and again of the same sins. Also, very important things needed to be said about God and His government.
13. Through the writings of Ellen White, Seventh-day Adventists have become acquainted with the great controversy theme behind all of Scripture. See the handout: "The Great Controversy Described in Scripture" posted on www.Theox.org in several places including in the General Topics section of the Teacher's Guides.
14. It is God's plan for us to become like His Son. Furthermore, the truth about God and His government is more important than our salvation! If God were like Satan claims He is—arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe—would you even want to live with Him forever? Christ's death was primarily to demonstrate the righteousness of God and, in contrast, the evil of Satan. This is not to say that the life and death of Jesus does not provide us with forgiveness of sin. It certainly does. But, the total picture is much larger.
15. Some scholars have pointed out that the return of Jesus Christ is the major theme of the New Testament. For example, see Acts 1:11; Matthew 24:26-27; Revelation 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; and Revelation 19:11-16. These verses are just a taste of what is included in the New Testament about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Would there have been any reason for Jesus Christ to come the first time if He did not plan to come back?
16. However, the Bible does not give us information which allows us to pinpoint the date when that event will happen. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus Himself stated that we not only *do not know* when it will happen but also He assures us that we *will not know* until it happens.
17. Unfortunately, several major portions of Scripture focus on delay. Think of the Exodus from Egypt. The children of Israel could have been in the promised land within a few weeks. But, they ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years because of a lack of faith in God's ability to care for them. But, it has been 174 years since the Great Disappointment in 1844!
18. The parable of the ten virgins recorded in Matthew 25:1-13 is a very sobering message for

us at the end of this earth's history. Do we have the kind of relationship with God that will support us through the final events of the great controversy? Have we filled our minds sufficiently with a knowledge of the Scriptures and a living relationship with the Holy Spirit so that we cannot be moved?

19. Our very name, Seventh-day Adventist, clearly points out that we believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. An *adventist* is one who believes in the second advent of Jesus.
20. Seventh-day Adventists have insisted that the Old Testament is an essential part of our understanding about God. We believe that the sacred annual cycle kept by the Jews was intended to be a pattern for the history of our world. Jesus is referred to repeatedly in the Bible, especially in the book of Hebrews, as *our High Priest*. He ministers for us in the heavenly sanctuary, first of all in the first compartment of that sanctuary known as the holy place, and then, after 1844, in the second compartment or most holy place. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we are talking about geography. God the Father is omnipresent. There is no place that Jesus could have been where the Father would not be present. The two compartments in the heavenly sanctuary represent two different tasks, just as the two different compartments in the Hebrew sanctuaries on this earth were intended to teach us about different phases of Jesus's work.
21. Read Hebrews 8:6-7; 9:11-12,21-28; and 1 John 1:9-2:2. These verses, which could be supplemented by many others, point out that Jesus is our High Priest who pleads on our behalf. He is not pleading to the Father to convince Him to forgive us and accept us; that would be pure paganism. (See John 16:25-27.) Instead, He is answering the charges of Satan brought against us before the court of the universe where millions of angels are in attendance. (See Daniel 7:9-13 and Zechariah 3:1-5.)
22. Seventh-day Adventists are unique in our belief that on October 22, 1844, a new phase of the work of Christ began in heaven. As pictured in Daniel 7, Jesus approached the Father to begin the work of the pre-advent judgment. To understand more about what happened on the Day of Atonement, read Leviticus 16.
23. Another crucial and very important doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists is our understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath. We believe that it was God's gift to us, given right in the Garden of Eden at creation when He rested, blessed that day, and sanctified it.
24. The Sabbath is an opportunity for us to meet with God and celebrate our relationship. A Jewish rabbi by the name of Abraham Joshua Heschel is famous for calling the Sabbath "a palace in time."
25. The children of Israel were reminded of the seventh-day Sabbath, and it is urged upon us in the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20:8-11. A somewhat different explanation is given for observing the Sabbath in Deuteronomy 5:12-15:

Exodus 20:8-11: ⁸ "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. ⁹ You have six days in which to do your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. ¹¹In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the LORD, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy."—*Good News Bible*.*

Deuteronomy 5:12-15: ¹² "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, as I, the LORD

your God, have commanded you. ¹³You have six days in which to do your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. Your slaves must rest just as you do. ¹⁵Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that I, the LORD your God, rescued you by my great power and strength. That is why I command you to observe the Sabbath.’ ”—*Good News Bible*.*

26. Ezekiel 20:12,20 remind us that the Sabbath is supposed to be a sign or contract between us and God.

Ezekiel 20:12,20: ¹²“I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the LORD, make them holy....”

²⁰“Make the Sabbath a holy day, so that it will be a sign of the covenant we made, and will remind you that I am the LORD your God.”—*Good News Bible*.*

27. Luke 4:16 makes it very clear that Jesus regularly observed the seventh-day Sabbath. Some of our detractors will point out that He did that because He was a Jew. But, if you read Acts 13:14,42,44; **16:13**; 17:2; and 18:4, it will be apparent that even when traveling far from Palestine, Paul and others many years after the resurrection carefully observed the seventh-day Sabbath.

28. Jesus repeatedly performed miracles of healing on the Sabbath to try to point out what kinds of things were appropriate to do on that day.

29. Hebrews 4:9 and Matthew 11:28-30 make it clear that God is still calling us to come to Him and enjoy a time of rest. Do you find the Sabbath to be a wonderful time of rest and respite from your daily activities of the week?

30. Another almost unique belief of Seventh-day Adventists is the doctrine spelled out very clearly in Genesis 2:7.

Genesis 2:7: Then the LORD God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live.—*Good News Bible*.*

31. We were not given immortality; we do not pass on to another world somewhere at the point of death. Only God has immortality. (1 Timothy: 6:16) Those who are dead have no consciousness. (See Ecclesiastes 9:5-6,10; Psalm 146:4; 115:17; and John 11:11-15.)

32. However, Jesus did promise us immortality if we stay connected to Him. Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; compare 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54: ⁵¹⁻⁵² Listen to this secret truth: we shall not all die, but when the last trumpet sounds, we shall all be changed in an instant, as quickly as the blinking of an eye. For when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, never to die again, and we shall all be changed. ⁵³For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. ⁵⁴So when this takes place, and the mortal has been changed into the immortal, then the scripture will come true: “Death is destroyed; victory is complete!”—*Good News Bible*.*

33. These passages should make it very clear that at the time of the resurrection which will occur at the second coming of Jesus, those who are on God’s side and are still alive on

this earth will be miraculously changed, and those who have died in harmony with God's plan for their lives will be resurrected from their graves to ascend to live with God forever.

34. Hopefully, every Seventh-day Adventist recognizes that Jesus is our Example and the One who is able to save us. He is our only source of righteousness. We can never be saved because of our own works. Christ's righteousness which is made available to us through the work of the Holy Spirit is our only hope.

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 25.2.

35. We have touched just briefly on some of our major doctrines and fundamental beliefs. There are many more. But, this package sets us apart from all other religions and denominations. Our understanding of the great controversy over God's character and form of government gives us a unique perspective on every other teaching in the Bible.
36. **How has your understanding of the core teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church impacted your life? How do these teachings impact us when we meet in class or discuss truth with those who have opinions different from ours?**
37. Are we clear in our understanding of the great controversy and its implications for all that we believe? Do we understand what is required for us to be sealed permanently as God's faithful people?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God's people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming (MS [*Manuscript*] 173, 1902).—Ellen G. White, *Ellen G. White Comments—Ezekiel, SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.6. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

38. The church has a very distinct reason for its existence. Our efforts should be focused on reaching out to those around us who have not heard the truth. We must not be just a friendly club.
39. How much of our time is spent in reaching out to others with the gospel?
40. Do we recognize that God's way is the only way in which we can live together in harmony even here but especially for eternity? Selfishness, which is Satan's way, will ultimately self-destruct. Do we want to be a part of that? We seem to have trouble living with a single partner for any length of time here on this earth. But, when we get to heaven, we will be living with people from all generations and all cultures for eternity. Is marriage supposed to be a warmup for heaven?
41. While we believe in unity, we do not believe in uniformity. It is not necessary for everyone of us to agree on every single detail. Having differences of opinion and differences in our understanding of Scripture is a powerful reason for sharing ideas and helping our faith grow.
42. Many of us have seen television programs and even photographs of events in major

sporting venues. People are sometimes given a card and told to hold up that card at a certain point when the signal is given. Each person's card may have only a single color on it; but, when they are held up by hundreds or even thousands of different people, the total picture can be seen. Cooperation has produced something that no single individual in the group could have done by himself.

43. How often do we do things as a church group that require working together? Do you and those you associate with in your church have a similar understanding of why Jesus had to die? Why did Paul say that a clear understanding of the life and death of Jesus would tear down barriers. (Ephesians 2:14)

Scripture calls for the church to be united, while at the same time, to hold fast to truth. This poses a dilemma. Truth is, by nature, exclusive. Pursuing truth involves rejection of error and is associated with the concept of purity. Thus, truth can be seen as selective and exclusive. On the other hand, unity is, by nature, inclusive. Consequently, discussions about unity often emphasize unity at the expense of truth or emphasize truth at the expense of unity. How, then, do we resolve this tension and pursue both truth and unity? Part of the solution can be found by examining what the Bible says about truth.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 108.

44. Clearly, God's Word sets out what God wants us to believe as the truth. Those truths are not just an exercise in intellectual assent; they are intended to be understood and incorporated into our lives. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can become a part of God's faithful end-time people. But, unfortunately, we tend to think that what we believe is ultimate truth; so, you should agree with me!
45. How do you feel when you read the parable of the ten virgins recorded in Matthew 25? Does it worry you?
46. In this lesson we have reviewed briefly our understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath and our basic core belief about the life and death of Jesus and what it teaches us about the great controversy. We believe the annual religious history of the Jews in the Old Testament gives us a clue about what happened in 1844 and helps us to realize that we are in the time of the pre-advent judgment.
47. This collection of beliefs, along with others that we hold, make us significantly different from all other Christian groups. Does recognizing that we are "different" in our beliefs help to bring us together with those of like beliefs? If we believe that the life of Jesus is our example and we are truly trying to follow Him, how should that impact how we deal with others who disagree with us theologically?
48. How has your understanding of the great controversy impacted your life? Have you reviewed our 28 fundamental beliefs recently? Are there some with which you do not agree? Why is that?

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