

## ***Oneness in Christ***

### ***The Most Convincing Proof***

Lesson #9 for December 1, 2018

Scriptures: John 11:51-52; Ephesians 2:13-16; 4:25-5:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Romans 14:1-6; Acts 1:14.

1. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that it is our responsibility to take the “three angels’ messages” to the whole world. (Revelation 14:6-12) We believe this includes a correct explanation of each of the biblical doctrines that we hold precious.
2. But, more important than just statements about what we believe are the changes it makes in our lives and actions. Does the world see the love, kindness, empathy, and actions in our lives to represent God correctly? Does the world see in our church communities the oneness in Christ in which we profess to believe?

Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ, and of His power to take away sin.—Ellen G. White, *Ellen G. White Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 5, 1148.

**The most convincing argument we can give to the world of Christ’s mission is to be found in perfect unity.... In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls.**—Ellen G. White, *Bible Training School*,\* February 1, 1906, par. 6-7; *Our High Calling*\* 170.4.

**A true, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Bible truth.**—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* January 14, 1904, par. 11.

**A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay.**—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*\* 144.3.

**A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument in favor of the gospel that can be produced.**—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,\* Book 3, 238.4.

**Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling.**—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 9, 21.1. [Bold type is added.]

Consider the poem “Sermons We See” by Edgar Albert Guest.

I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day;  
I’d rather one should walk with me than merely tell the way.  
The eye’s a better pupil more willing than the ear,  
Fine counsel is confusing, but example’s always clear;  
And the best of all the preachers are the men who live their creeds,  
For to see good put in action is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it if you’ll let me see it done;

I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run.  
And the lecture you deliver may be very wise and true,  
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do;  
For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.

When I see a deed of kindness, I am eager to be kind.  
When a weaker brother stumbles and a strong man stays behind  
Just to see if he can help him, then the wish grows strong in me  
To become as big and thoughtful as I know that friend to be.  
And all travelers can witness that the best of guides today  
Is not the one who tells them, but the one who shows the way.

One good man teaches many, men believe what they behold;  
One deed of kindness noticed is worth forty that are told.  
Who stands with men of honor learns to hold his honor dear,  
For right living speaks a language which to every one is clear.  
Though an able speaker charms me with his eloquence, I say,  
I'd rather see a sermon than hear one, any day.—Edgar Albert Guest, 26  
August 2018. <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sermons-we-see/>

3. Where does this spiritual unity that we believe in come from? Is it something that we produce by working together as a group? Or, is it a gift of God? How has the life and death of Jesus impacted us as individuals? As a group? If we are to work together in spreading the gospel to the world, how does that actually happen?
4. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that small groups are the best “growing factors” for the Christian church. People who come to know each other and decide to work together to promote the gospel are the spark plugs of the church.
5. Read John 11:51-52 and Ephesians 1:7-10.

**John 11:51-52:** <sup>51</sup>Actually, he did not say this of his own accord; rather, as he was High Priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish people, <sup>52</sup>and not only for them, but also to bring together into one body all the scattered people of God.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., John 11:51–52). New York: American Bible Society.

**Ephesians 1:7-10:** <sup>7</sup>For **by the blood of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.** How great is the grace of God, <sup>8</sup>which he gave to us in such large measure!

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.**—*Good News Bible.\** [Bold type is added.]

6. How does forgiving our sins set us free? God has always been forgiving. That did not start at Calvary. So, in what sense are we set free by the events of crucifixion weekend? And how does that affect the onlooking universe who have been “brought together” by those events?

What do these passages tell us about the impact that the life and especially the death of Christ are supposed to have on the entire universe? And how has crucifixion weekend affected the onlooking universe who are brought together by those events?

**Ephesians 3:7-10:** <sup>7</sup> I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift, which he gave me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ, <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*.\* [Bold type is added.]

7. What can we possibly teach the “angelic rulers and powers” about God? Did they learn something from the life and death of Jesus on this earth? (See *Desire of Ages* 758-764.)

To the angels and the unfallen worlds the cry, “It is finished,” had a deep significance. It was for them as well as for us that the great work of redemption had been accomplished. They with us share the fruits of Christ's victory.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 758.2. (See 1 Corinthians 4:9.)

8. The angels did not need to have their sins forgiven! So, what did they need?

**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.]

9. How did the cross bring “back to God all things, both on earth and in heaven”?
10. Presiding over the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas clearly thought that Jesus needed to be eliminated in order to prevent the total destruction of their system that they had worked out with the Roman government. He saw that if people believed and acted on what Jesus taught, their system would be finished.
11. John, quoting Caiaphas, understood the statement in a much larger context. So, we need to ask ourselves: “How does the life and death of Jesus bring the entire universe into harmony once again?”
12. Our foundational message includes the entire universe. It was not just for us that Jesus died. God is bringing the entire universe back into harmony through the death of His Son. What does the death of Jesus do for the beings in the rest of the universe? It answers all the questions and accusations raised by Satan against the government of God. Remember that those accusations were first raised in the courts of heaven right next to the throne of God.
13. By being baptized as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we realize that we are part of a group that is commissioned to work together to finish the gospel on this earth under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever differences we may perceive culturally, socially, ethnically, or politically, nothing is supposed to stop us from accomplishing that ultimate goal. Television evangelists say that if they had the power of the Holy Spirit, they would finish the gospel. Are they really smarter than God?
14. As we look around this world in which we live, there is almost endless disorder, troubles, wars, and conflicts of every kind. But, we know that this will not continue forever. God is just

waiting for us to cooperate with Him to bring all of that to an end.

15. Read Ephesians 2:13-16. Paul recognized that a correct understanding of the gospel lived out in the lives of Christian believers would abolish all separating walls such as that which had been built up between Jews and Gentiles.

16. More than that:

**2 Corinthians 5:17-21:** <sup>17</sup>Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. <sup>18</sup>All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. <sup>19</sup>Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends.

<sup>20</sup> Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends! <sup>21</sup>Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.—*Good News Bible*.\*

17. We understand that we have been called to be the remnant community of Christians who will live through the final days of this earth's history. We are as far as anyone has been from the tree of life. In order to do that, we must not only be united in our beliefs and practices relative to God, but also in our unity and love toward our fellow church members. (John 13:35)

18. This kind of unity in action would demonstrate that God's plan of redemption has worked, is true, and is powerful. The great controversy is all about demonstrating that God has told the truth and that the Devil has lied to us in every important aspect down through history.

19. As they watch us, do you think the angels are encouraged about God's ability to pull together a people that represent Him correctly? Is the world seeing more and more of the character of God in our church? Or, is the Devil succeeding in many churches?

20. What is our ultimate goal?

What Christ was in His life on this earth, that every Christian is to be. He is our example, not only in His spotless purity, but in His patience, gentleness, and winsomeness of disposition.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* July 16, 1902, par. 3; *3SM*\* 237.2; *OFC*\* 156.3; *IHP*\* 181.2.

21. Does this seem like an impossible goal? What do you think is implied by these words? Can we really be just like Jesus? In what way or ways? Do these words remind us of Paul's words in Philippians 2:5 and 1 Corinthians 11:1?

22. Read Ephesians 4:25-5:2 and Colossians 3:1-17. Paul did not hesitate to point out the problems that he observed in the churches that he had helped to start. Things like lying, anger, robbing, evil-speaking, making God's Holy Spirit sad, bitterness, passion, and hateful feelings cannot be a part of God's end-time people. These do not represent lives patterned after Jesus. He strongly warned against sexual immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions, and greed; and then, he went on to spell out how these things are to be replaced by Christ's message: love, kindness, forgiving others, etc.

23. Similar sentiments are represented elsewhere in the New Testament. See Matthew 7:12; Galatians 6:2; Matthew 16:24-26; 1 Peter 3:3-4; and 1 Corinthians 10:31.

24. Do we correctly understand the impact our lives are having on those around us? Do they see Christ reflected in us? How many really care about what others think? We live in a world that has almost no idea about the character of God. A unified church living out lives like the life of Jesus Christ would stand out like an incredible light to the world. Are we doing that?
25. If every Christian were doing just what you are doing to advance the gospel by representing Christ to those around you, how soon would the gospel be finished?
26. But, having traveled around the Mediterranean world, Paul recognized that there was considerable diversity to which Christianity had to adapt itself. Read Romans 14:1-6. In these verses Paul was not talking about clearly-defined teachings from God's Word but about many lesser beliefs that people had and carried as their own personal opinions. Some felt free to eat anything they found in the meat market. Others did not; they ate only vegetables. Paul pointed out that we are all servants of God and answerable only to Him.
27. That included how they treated certain special religious feasts as well as fasting. Those were regarded as very important by conservative Jews.
28. The issue of eating meat that had been offered to idols was a contentious one in the early church. See Acts 15; Romans 14; and 1 Corinthians 8&10. Jews who had become Christians tended to want Christianity to be a subset of Judaism. They felt that real Christians should first be fully Jewish including the practice of circumcision before becoming Christian. But, having been a Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul more clearly discerned what was really important and what was not.
29. In our day, what kinds of things that are not really that important might divide churches? Some Christian believers feel comfortable wearing certain types of jewelry, particularly wedding rings; others do not. Some groups feel very strongly about a vegetarian diet; others feel more free and eat a variety of clean meats. Some Christian groups are very concerned about the style or length of women's dresses; others are not. The list could go on and on. We are not talking about what is healthy; instead, this is about how we are perceived by those around us.
30. So, what can we learn from the example of the disciples that might be a warning to us? Or, an encouragement to us?
 

**Luke 22:24:** An argument broke out among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Acts 1:14:** They gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Acts 2:1,46-47:** <sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost came, all the believers were gathered together in one place.... <sup>46</sup>Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people.—*Good News Bible*.\*
31. What brought about that incredible change in the attitudes of the disciples? There were many things that they could have pointed to as accusations against their fellow disciples; but, those no longer mattered to them. They were united in their goal to spread the wonderful news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the entire world.

These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They

realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 37.2.

Strife for the supremacy makes manifest a spirit that, if cherished, will eventually shut out from the kingdom of God those who cherish it. The peace of Christ cannot dwell in the mind and heart of a workman who criticizes and finds fault with another workman simply because the other does not practice the methods he thinks best, or because he feels that he is not appreciated. The Lord never blesses him who criticizes and accuses his brethren, for this is Satan's work.—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 21*,\* 1894; *Evangelism*\* 102.3.

32. Of course, Seventh-day Adventists are not the only Christians who believe in the life and death of Jesus Christ. What can we say or do to reach out to Christians of other persuasions? No other group has the same understanding of the death of Christ as we do; ours is based on our understanding of the great controversy. A correct understanding of the great controversy and how it has divided the universe will help us to reach out to others with the truth of the gospel. Are we trying to do that?
33. What has been your experience? Do you agree that seeing someone live out their beliefs in practical applications is more impressive than just hearing them talk about it? How desperately does our world need to see the life of Christ lived out in Christians today?
34. If we insist on doing things our way even when we upset others by doing so, we are following the example of Satan. But, if we manage to live together in harmony and in Christ-like belief and action, it is an unanswerable argument in favor of the gospel.
35. Can you think of one or more individuals who have had an important impact on your own life because of their Christian witness and behavior? What things do you see in your own life that still need changing?
36. If we could have a secret camera following each of us for the next week, how would that collective presentation fit with what God would like to see in us?
37. Do you agree that a united, harmonious, Christ-like church, believing and living out the gospel, would be a powerful force in the world? What keeps us from practicing that new identity?
38. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. What does it mean to be reconciled to the point of becoming friends of God and Jesus Christ? Do you think of God as your personal Friend?

“The church is called to be an expression of this alternative society. . . . A place where the upside-down priorities of the Beatitudes operate. Where service is more important than status, where humility trumps hubris, where love is expressed instead of lust, and where collaboration replaces competition.”—Lowell C. Cooper, “Doing Justice, Loving Mercy—in the End Time,” in *Do Justice: Our Call to Faithful Living*, edited by Nathan Brown and Joanna Darby (Warburton, Victoria: Signs Publishing Company, 2014), p. 86.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 122].

39. Does Hollywood demonstrate such a society? How could you go about starting the process of transforming your church, your family, and yourself into that pattern?

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