

A Unified Church

How it stays together--how it is divided

Part 1: Christ's Prayer For Unity

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Lucifer set the whole disunity thing moving in heaven. War was initiated within those pure gates. He chose his own way, and there has been division ever since. The perfect unity of the universe was tarnished. A third of the created angels were cast out, unfitting themselves for their amazing estate. This division has been passed on and now infects our tiny planet. This globe has seen conflicts, wars, and bloodshed, and recent events among the nations testify to the great need for unity and oneness. Disunity plagues humanity.

Unity is essential for the happiness and harmony of all things. But Satan has successfully managed to tweak even this--we might have thought "untweakable"--subject. Beneath the sophistication of his counterfeit unity it turns out there is really little more than theological pluralism, the "peaceful" coexistence of truth and error. Set forth in some areas of the Adventist Church, this kind of "unity" has a subtle trend to undermine. Biblical beliefs, lifestyle practices, sense of mission, and our unique form of church government--all are impacted.

This is not all. Mixing truth with error or vice versa, does one of two things, sometimes both. When error is put with truth, truth is robbed of its luster, purity, and power. When a bit of truth is dropped in with error, error is given credibility. Some are dangerously fooled. We must not be seduced by Satan's counterfeit form of unity, theological pluralism. By subtle means we would be immersed in confusion and God's church robbed of Holy Spirit power.

This article and three to come will consider what authentic Biblical unity entails. True unity will be contrasted with the counterfeit. We will suggest practical responses the believer can offer when he sees certain things taking place in our Lord's churches, schools, hospitals, and administrative offices in those dark times when they are drifting into the practice of unbiblical ideologies.

Christ's Prayer for Unity

Jesus' prayer for unity is found in John 17. There, we are treated to one of the most powerful prayers for His church. The Apostle John recalls our Lord and Savior's last words before His crucifixion and death for us. The message reveals His innermost thoughts for the leaders He has trained. Jesus prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me (John 17:20-23).

Considering this prayer in its entirety, it becomes clear that a primary concern of Christ was for unity. Five times He prayed for His followers that "they may be one, as

we are" (vs. 11), "that they all be one" (v. 21a), "that they also may be one in Us" (v. 21b), "that they may be one, even as *we are One*" (v. 22), and "that they may be made perfect in One" (v. 23) (emphasis added). This unity that our Savior prayed for is founded in the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The unity seen here is not first that followers might be one with each other. Nor was it simply harmony and fellowship amongst believers the world over. Rather, it was a unity based on two points: Unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and unity with the apostles' teaching.

First, we have, "that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21b). This is unity with the God family, the three powers of the heavenly trio: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is seen when the church prays humbly for power to live in obedience to the truths and leadings of the Spirit Whom the Father and Son send. It is only as Christ's followers are "in Us" (that is, in the Father and Son, through the Spirit) that can they truly "be one" with each other.

In other words, only as we are connected to Christ, may we find full unity with one another. For, "without me," Jesus said, "you can do nothing" (John 15:5b). This means we will humbly accept the correction of the Spirit and His guidance into all truth, including His leading through the end-time gift of prophecy (Revelation 1:2, 3; 12:17; 19:10). On this platform of individual and personal oneness with God, rests the hope of full unity in the church.

Christ also said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Here is that unity which comes to all believers "through their word." That word is the word of the disciples whom Jesus was praying for, who would become the apostles of the church. The unity He wants to see in His church is one in harmony with the teachings of Christ's inspired apostles. It is spiritual and it is doctrinal. It is grounded on the Word of God. Like the apostolic

church, believers in God's end-time church must "devote themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship" (Acts 2:42).

Any ideology or practice rumbling down the pike that is not in harmony with God's teachings, hinders Christ's prayer for unity. Faithful believers must courageously and kindly reject such ideologies, regardless of who promotes them. It is that unity in friendship with Christ and the grand truths He taught, handed down through the ages in His Word, for which we must humbly pray every day.

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