

## **A Unified Church**

How it stays together--how it is divided

### Part 3: Threats to Our Unity

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God has given this Great Advent Movement a firm and balanced basis for unity. He has equipped us to grasp something of the Bible's distinctive truths. Scripture contains important teachings. Then, how urgent that we share these with a lost world. His Spirit creates in us a sense of mission, a desire to share the everlasting gospel of (Matthew 28:18-20) in the context of the three angel's messages of (Revelation 14:6-12).

Our Lord also has led us so that we are organized in a unique kind of church polity (organizational structure). This polity helps us carry forward the mission of the church in our end-time context. These three things, (Bible based doctrines, a specific end-time mission, and a unique church polity), form a solid foundation for our organized unity.

These factors, along with the Lord's blessings, help explain why the Seventh-day Adventist church is growing all over the world. Since our church's inception, we have for the most part, enjoyed a special unity as brothers and sisters in Christ with a unique work.

## Threats to our unity

Unfortunately, there are fresh threats to our unity as a people. The spirit of Laodicea lives in the church. Tensions exist in some places concerning distinct Seventh-day Adventist doctrines and practices. As unsound, even worldly schemes and methods and entertainment have found their way into our preaching and worship, the long-standing Adventist sense of mission is slipping away. Ideologies borrowed from those who do not believe the truth for this time are accepted and taught in some Adventist circles.

These developments have not been without results. There is an increasing trend toward congregationalism. Dissident and offshoot movements persist at a low rumble. These things are disrupting unity at the local level. If they remain unchecked, or become cherished, or even, God forbid, find encouragement at conference, union, and division levels, risk increases. Adventist unity could be fractured at the global scale.

This is Satan's plan. He will do all he can to dismantle and disrupt the special message that God has for His end-time movement (Revelation 12:17). He is working to destroy that unity which makes taking Heaven's message to the world possible. One way he accomplishes this is through our adoption of a pseudo-unity that is not Biblical unity at all.

A counterfeit unity is promulgated; outside, things look good. This masked disunity has a twofold impact.

First, it teaches that God and all good people are for unity, while Satan and all bad people are for division. Second, it confuses true unity with the absence of conflict or the tolerance of error.

Is unity always good and division always bad? If God always unites and the devil always divides, shouldn't we be able to see things more clearly than we sometimes do?

God sometimes divides. The first time the word “divide” is mentioned in scripture we are told, “and God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:4b). The first Divider was God who, at creation, made light and darkness separate. This division set the direction for God’s dealings in the natural and spiritual realms. Light and darkness are different; they do not go together. If we try to have both in the same place at the same time, we have neither. What we are left with is dimness and obscurity.

It may surprise us, but the devil sometimes unites. He united one third of the angels of heaven. They joined his rebellion. He caused war in that holy place (Revelation 12:7, 8), and then tempted our first parents to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, uniting that which God Himself had declared were divided (Genesis 3:1-5). He tempted the priests of Judah to so that they “put no difference between the holy and the profane, neither have they shown difference between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 22:26). Satan has his way of being a unifier.

Unity is not always good and division always bad. But uniting things that should never have been united in the first place is never good, even where this is possible. At the same time, to divide things that should be united is never right. To understand or to have the ability to divide what should be divided, and unite what should be united, requires knowledge of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s gift of discernment. Thus, we must be careful that in our quest for unity we do not attempt to harmonize right and wrong, truth and error. The Apostle Paul writes, “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Unity is not the same as there being no conflict. Satan would prefer us to accept that theological differences are normal. You can believe what you want, and I’ll believe what I want. We’re all united--one happy family. Let’s not stir anything up. Yet, lack of conflict does not necessarily mean the existence of unity. It is thought that the absence of conflict is evidence of true unity. This is sometimes true, but not always.

In some of our churches we have different Sabbath School classes to allow for different theologies. Or, different worship services are organized for those who desire a more upbeat contemporary style, as compared to those who prefer a more conventional format. We then celebrate and emphasize these differences and call it unity. Does such coexistence bring about true unity?

Coexistence is not the same as unity. It is true that the wheat and the tares grow together, the sheep and the goats live on the same farm. But the time is coming when Christ Himself will divide these. The fact that wheat and tares grow together does not mean they should cross-pollinate. Sheep and goats may graze near one another, but that does not mean they should interbreed. The just and the unjust may live next to each other and enjoy the same sunshine and rain, but that does not mean they should forget their moral differences and marry. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

We must strive to uphold that true unity that is founded on Christ and Him crucified, and in the grand truths of scripture that we call doctrine. Unity is seen where we cleave "to the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Sometimes, striving to uphold this unity, the unity founded on Christ's Word, brings conflict and persecution (2 Timothy 3:12). It has always been thus. We must never buy unity at the expense of loyalty to Christ and His teachings.

In the last days of this world's history an attempt will be made to enforce that kind of unity which threatens actual unity. Arguments will be brought forward, some perhaps similar to what we have discussed here. God's true followers will not embrace this kind of unity. They will not compromise their thinking by adopting any of the devil's mixed bag of tricks, whether theological pluralism or some other form of "peaceful" coexistence of truth with error. They will remain steadfast and determined to live for the King and truth entrusted to us as a people. They will courageously choose

to separate themselves from the path of disobedience. They will stand unified on the faith of Jesus and His commandments in the church (Revelation 14:12).

Until then, we will need to pray much. We will need the wisdom that only God can give as we serve in the church He has so graciously allowed us to be a part of. Along with this, we will need to respond in a Christ-like manner when difficult situations come. The final article in this series will suggest how this might be accomplished.

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