



# Readings for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 2,  
through  
Sabbath, December 10, 2011

**Unity  
in the Family  
and the Church**

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# Introduction

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Have you ever seen a bundle of twigs tied together? What impression did you have of this? Did you ever try to break something like this? What was the result? You wouldn't be able to break them, because they seemed to have the strength of an entire tree trunk. But if you would disconnect and separate them from each other, it would be simple to break each one individually! Think of this in connection to a marriage, a family, or the church. Unity is strength, but division leads to weakness and, ultimately, ruin!

Today, marriage and the family are more and more at risk. And the church, the main focus of Satan's attacks, is also going to be severely tested and tried. To prevent its destruction, the apostle Paul stressed the importance of harmony and unity in the above two areas of life: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband." Ephesians 5:31-33.

When a marriage disintegrates and the spouses, who previously loved and supported each other, become estranged, our hearts bleed and our tongues become silent. When families break apart, our thoughts go out especially to the children who suffer so much because of the division of their parents. One would like to help both the husband and the wife, but in such a case human help is very limited. And, yes, most of these catastrophes could be avoided if practical counsel would be received and carried out.

"Let fathers and mothers make a solemn promise to God, whom they profess to love and obey, that by His grace they will not disagree between themselves, but will in their own life and temper manifest the spirit that they wish their children to cherish....

"The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be—an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love, may represent the family of heaven....

"Parents should be careful not to allow the spirit of dissension to creep into the home; for this is one of Satan's agents to make his impression on the character. If parents will strive for unity in the home by inculcating the principles that governed the life of Christ, dissension will be driven out, and unity and love will abide there. Parents and children will partake of the gift of the Holy Spirit....

"Although trials may arise in the married life, the husband and the wife are to

keep their souls in the love of God. The father should look upon the mother of his children as one deserving of all kindness, tenderness, and sympathy." —*The Adventist Home*, pp. 178, 100, 179.

No less painful is a divided church, where members are in conflict with each other. Sometimes the problems are because of temperament or habits. In other cases, there are long-standing disagreements because of differences in education, customs, or conflicting convictions. Disagreements may not only appear in common conversation but also spill over into church meetings or even worship services. Every person should remember that each one has a duty—a very solemn one responsibility—to maintain harmony and unity in the earthly family of God! Just as "In the government of children there must never be a difference of opinion between the parents" (*Bible Echo*, March 9, 1903), so in the church the apostle Paul urged all members to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:1-3.

The writings of the Spirit of prophecy state: "Divisions in the church dishonor the religion of Christ before the world and give occasion to the enemies of truth to justify their course.... What are we doing to preserve unity in the bonds of peace?" —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 239.

How can unity become a reality in the church? How can wounds be healed and distances be narrowed? Who will be the first to build bridges of communication so the rich harmony and power existing in the early church may be seen in the church today? The inspired message is: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:1-5.

And the following counsel speaks to every heart and mind: "By the influence of the Spirit, the most discordant may be brought into harmony. Unselfishness is to bind God's people together with firm, tender bonds. There is a vast power in the church when the energies of the members are under the control of the Spirit, gathering good from every source, educating, training, and disciplining

self. Thus is presented to God a powerful organization, through which He can work for the conversion of sinners. Thus heaven and earth are connected, and all divine agencies cooperate with human instrumentalities." —*My Life Today*, p. 39.

"It is not the opposition of the world that we have to fear; but it is the elements that work among ourselves that have hindered the message. The efficiency of the movements for extending the truth depends upon the harmonious action of those who profess to believe it. Love and confidence constitute a moral force that would have united our churches, and insured harmony of action; but coldness and distrust have brought disunion that has shorn us of our strength." —*General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 28, 1893.

"If God's professed people would receive the light as it shines upon them from His word, they would reach that unity for which Christ prayed, that which the apostle describes, 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' 'There is,' he says, 'one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' Ephesians 4:3-5." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 379.

With this goal before us, Sabbath, December 10, will be a day of fasting and prayer. Please make it a special day of meeting and blessing. Following the last reading, the special offering for the Week of Prayer will be gathered. These offerings will be used for the General Conference's missionary projects.

Dear brothers and sisters all over the world, the coming of Jesus is drawing nearer and nearer. Every day the signs of the times are becoming clearer and more impressive. It is time to awake and re-consecrate all we have to Him who has given His life for us. This Week of Prayer is the time to rededicate ourselves completely to His service, so that "in all holy conversation and godliness" we may be "diligent and . . . be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." 2 Peter 3:11, 14.

In the past year, the Lord granted His people many rich blessings; every day His grace was poured upon out in mercy. Are we willing to do something for Him in the coming year? Let each individual child of God be an instrument of unity in his or her own marriage (if married), in the family, and in the church. As we share these readings at the year's end, may the power of heaven be permitted to move so mightily among us that when the Lord comes He will find us of one heart and spirit, ready to be welcomed into His kingdom of peace and harmony.

—*The brothers and sisters of the General Conference*

## Unity brings Peace and Progress

By Ellen G. White

### Readings for the Week of Prayer

December 2-10, 2011

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Issued by the  
General Conference  
International Missionary Society  
Seventh-day Adventist Church  
Reform Movement

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### Unity in the family and with heaven

The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to their neighbors nigh and afar off. Those who have received light are to let the light shine forth in clear rays. Their words, fragrant with the love of Christ, are to be a savor of life unto life....

If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence. Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished. He who manifests the spirit of tenderness, forbearance, and love will find that the same spirit will be reflected upon him. Where the Spirit of God reigns, there will be no talk of unsuitability in the marriage relation. If Christ indeed is formed within, the hope of glory, there will be union and love in the home. Christ abiding in the heart of the wife will be at agreement with Christ abiding in the heart of the husband. They will be striving together for the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for those who love Him....

There should exist in the minister's family a unity that will preach an effectual sermon on practical godliness. As the minister and his wife faithfully do their duty in the home, restraining, correcting, advising, counseling, guiding, they are becoming better fitted to labor in the church and are multiplying agencies for the accomplishment of God's work outside the home. The members of the family become members of the family above and are a power for good, exerting a far-reaching influence....

The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution [marriage] what God designed it should be—an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love, may represent the family of heaven....

### Causes of division in the family and the church

**Separation from Christ.** The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not

a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ. —*The Adventist Home*, pp. 37, 120, 359, 100, 179.

Paul urges the Ephesians to preserve unity and love.... Divisions in the church dishonor the religion of Christ before the world and give occasion to the enemies of truth to justify their course. —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 211.

**Claims of new light leading to a breach.** From that which the Lord has been pleased to show me, there will arise just such ones all along, and many more of them, claiming to have new light, which is a side issue, an entering wedge. The widening will increase until there is a breach made between those who accept these views and those who believe the third angel's message.

Just as soon as these new ideas are accepted, then there will be a drawing away from those whom God has used in this work, for the mind begins to doubt and withdraw from the leaders, because God has laid them aside and chosen "more humble" men to do His work. —*Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 409, 410.

**Personal opinion in opposition to the body.** The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds who have claimed that they were right.... Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these cannot be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The word of Inspiration is not Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 428, 429.

**Fault-finding.** None who continue to cherish a querulous, fault-finding disposition can enter heaven; for they would mar its peace and harmony. They will be left outside the city of God, with all who stir up strife. Nor should they be permitted to remain in the church to prevent unity and destroy its usefulness. Let them be reproved, and if they do not change

their course, let them be separated from the church. But all may, if they will, conquer these evil traits. The members of the church should pledge themselves to walk together in harmony. Each should set a guard over his own heart, not permitting himself to think evil of his brethren, but giving them credit for all the good qualities they possess. We should store the mind with the precious promises and instructions of God's word. When Satan seeks to divert the attention to things of no profit, then we should think and talk of these heavenly promises, and the tempter will be vanquished. By thus battling day by day, with earnest prayer and determined faith, all may gain the victory. Those who have most to overcome will be like the sinner to whom Christ forgave much, and who loved much; and they will at last stand nearest to the throne. —*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 214.

While you so readily think and speak evil of one another, while you allow the root of bitterness to spring up and be cherished, your influence scatters from Christ and hardens hearts in resistance to the sweet spirit of unity and peace. Put it all away without a moment's delay. "Love one another," Christ says, "as I have loved you." John 15:12. —(Letter 33, 1890) *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 639.

## ***Harmony in the home and the church***

The apostle Paul exhorts us, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Care should be taken by Christians to give no offense, that the truth may not be evil spoken of. . . . Dissensions will arise even between church members, because they are not Christlike in character. In the home they are oppressive and a reproach to the cause of Christ. Their practices are inconsistent with truth and religion, and to retain them in church fellowship would be unfaithfulness to the Master. The church as a body is to do all in its power to promote union and prevent schisms. If unsound doctrine is introduced, the safety of the flock of Christ will be endangered; and it is the duty of those in authority, who are jealous for the truth as it is in Jesus, to make a firm, decided protest. —*Review and Herald*, January 16, 1900.

***Harmony leads to progress.*** Unless we can have unity and harmony, there will be a retarding of the work continually. —*Sermons and Talks*, vol. 2, p. 322.

The spirit of contention that some have revealed, has greatly retarded the progress of the Lord's work. We are all to unify on the proper basis of unity. —*Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists*, No. 7, p. 55.

Patience will seek for unity in the church, in the family, and in the community. This grace must be woven into our lives. Everyone should mount this round of progress, and add to faith, virtue, and temperance, the grace of patience. —*Peter's Counsel to Parents*, p. 19.

Unity and love will accomplish wonderful things for the believers. Will not our churches arouse and give the last warning message to the world? —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 70.

## ***An attitude of unity***

***Press together.*** Those who are truly converted will press together in Christian unity. Let there be no division in the church of God, no unwise authority exercised over those who accept the truth. The meekness of Christ is to appear in all that is said and done. —*Gospel Workers*, p. 485.

He [God] calls upon His people to work in perfect harmony. . . . No word is to be spoken to discourage any, for this grieves the heart of Christ and greatly pleases the adversary. All need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit; all should refrain from censuring and disparaging remarks and draw near to Christ, that they may appreciate the heavy responsibilities which the co-workers with Him are carrying. "Press together; press together," are the words of our divine Instructor. Unity is strength; disunion is weakness and defeat. —*Counsels on Health*, pp. 517, 518.

***United in teaching.*** God is leading a people. . . . They will not be at variance, one believing one thing, and another having faith and views entirely opposite, each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith. If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinions of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren? —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 446, 447.

***Unity in faith and order.*** . . . The church must flee to God's Word and become established upon gospel order, which has been overlooked and neglected. This is indispensably necessary in order to bring the church into the unity of the faith. I saw that in the apostles' day the church was in danger

of being deceived and imposed upon by false teachers. Therefore the brethren chose men who had given good evidence that they were capable of ruling well their own house and preserving order in their own families, and who could enlighten those who were in darkness. . . . There is order in heaven. There was order in the church when Christ was upon the earth, and after His departure order was strictly observed among His apostles. And now in these last days, while God is bringing His children into the unity of the faith, there is more real need of order than ever before; for, as God unites His children, Satan and his evil angels are very busy to prevent this unity and to destroy it. —*Early Writings*, pp. 100, 101, 97.

## ***Achieving unity***

***The Saviour's burden.*** That union and love might exist among His disciples was the burden of our Saviour's last prayer for them prior to His crucifixion. With the agony of the cross before Him, His solicitude was not for Himself, but for those whom He should leave to carry forward His work in the earth. The severest trials awaited them, but Jesus saw that their greatest danger would be from a spirit of bitterness and division. Hence He prayed:

"Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth. As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 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." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 236, 237.

***Sacrifice for reconciliation.*** If it seems hard to yield, remember that for our sakes God surrendered his dearly beloved Son to the agonies of crucifixion. When so great a sacrifice has been made to save men, to reconcile them to God, and to bring them into unity with one another, what sacrifice is too great in order to secure and preserve that unity? There is nothing too precious for us to give to Jesus. Nor will this course result in our personal loss. Every effort we make for Christ will be rewarded; every sacrifice that we make, every duty that we perform in His name, will minister to our own happiness. —*Bible Echo*, September 1, 1888.

***The source of unity.*** Seek for unity; cultivate love and conformity to Christ in all things. He is the source of unity and strength. . . .

If you do as God would have you, His blessing will come into the church. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 348.

The Lord has had a church from that day, through all the changing scenes of time to the present period, 1893. The Bible sets before us a model church. They are to be in unity with each other, and with God. When believers are united to Christ, the living vine, the result is that they are one with Christ, full of sympathy and tenderness and love. —*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 18.

**Staying close to Christ.** God's people have many lessons to learn. They will have perfect peace if they will keep the mind stayed on Him who is too wise to err and too good to do them harm. They are to catch the reflection of the smile of God, and reflect it to others. They are to see how much sunshine they can bring into the lives of those around them. They are to keep near to Christ, so close that they sit together with Him as His little children, in sweet, sacred unity. They are never to forget that as they receive the affection and love of God, they are under the most solemn obligation to impart it to others. Thus they may exert an influence of rejoicing, which blesses all who come within its reach, irradiating their pathway. —*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 378.

### ***Precious joy in oneness of spirit***

**Of one heart and soul.** And it should be their earnest, constant effort to preserve the unity of the faith; to cherish love and affection for each other as children of God. I thought if even two or three were united in the truth as it is in Jesus, what good they might do! What precious promises are given to them! Where two or three are agreed together as touching anything they shall ask in the name of Jesus, it shall be done for them. These souls, then, if of one heart, of one mind, of one purpose, will see of the salvation of God, and will be blessed. —*Review and Herald*, September 27, 1887.

**Mutual support in missionary service.** Never can the church reach the position that God desires it to reach until it is bound up in sympathy with its missionary workers. Never can the unity for which Christ prayed exist until spirituality is brought into missionary service, and until the church becomes an agency for the support of missions. The efforts of the missionaries will not accomplish what they should until the church members in the home field show, not only in word, but in deed, that they realize the obligation resting on them to give these missionaries their hearty support. —*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 47, 48.

**Spiritual oneness in marriage.** The happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of the parties; but between the believer and the unbeliever there is a radical difference of

tastes, inclinations, and purposes. They are serving two masters, between whom there can be no concord. However pure and correct one's principles may be, the influence of an unbelieving companion will have a tendency to lead away from God.... The Lord's direction is, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." 2 Corinthians 6:14. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 57.

**The happiness and prosperity of the married life depend upon the unity of the parties.** How can the carnal mind harmonize with the mind that is assimilated to the mind of Christ? One is sowing to the flesh, thinking and acting in accordance with the promptings of his own heart; the other is sowing to the Spirit, seeking to repress selfishness, to overcome inclination, and to live in obedience to the Master, whose servant he professes to be. Thus there is a perpetual difference of taste, of inclination, and of purpose. Unless the believer shall, through his steadfast adherence to principle, win the impenitent, he will, as is much more common, become discouraged and sell his religious principles for the poor companionship of one who has no connection with Heaven. —*The Adventist Home*, p. 84.

**Love and unity in the family and the church.** Unity and love will accomplish wonderful things for the believers. Will not our churches arouse, and give the last warning message to the world? —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 69, 70 (1909).


That family, properly conducted, is a favorable argument to the truth, and the head of such a family will carry out the very same kind of work in the church as is revealed in the family. Wherever severity, harshness, and want of affection and love are exhibited in the sacred circle of the home, there will most assuredly be a failure in the plans and management in the church. Unity in the home, unity in the church, reveals Christ's manner and grace more than sermons and arguments.... Is the truth, the advanced truth we have received, producing in our own hearts the fruits of patience, faith, hope, charity, and thus leaving its saving influence upon human minds, revealing that we are branches of the true Vine because we bear rich clusters of fruit? —(Letter 6b, 1890) *Evangelism*, pp. 342, 343.

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion." Thus is portrayed the happiness and grace that will be revealed when unity and love abide in the church. —*Review and Herald*, May 12, 1903.

**Love and happiness.** It is of the highest importance that the youth understand

that Christ's people are to be united in one; for this unity binds men to God by the golden cords of love, and lays each one under obligation to work for his fellow men. The Captain of our salvation died for the human race that men might be made one with Him and with each other. As members of the human family we are individual parts of one mighty whole. No soul can be made independent of the rest. There is to be no party strife in the family of God; for the well-being of each is the happiness of the whole. No partition walls are to be built up between man and man. Christ as the great center must unite all in one. —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 479.

**Undivided affections, perfection, and joy.** We are representatives of Jesus Christ in character, and are to serve Him with our undivided affections. Not only will we reveal the fact that we love God, but will, in accordance with His holy character, live a pure, perfect life. We must live perfection, because in looking at Jesus we see in Him the embodiment of perfection; and the great Center upon whom our hope of eternal life and happiness is centered will lead us to unity and harmony. —*The Upward Look*, p. 36. Amen.



“Just as you conduct yourself in your home life, you are registered in the books of heaven. He who would become a saint in heaven must first become a saint in his own family. If fathers and mothers are true Christians in the family, they will be useful members of the church and be able to conduct affairs in the church and in society after the same manner in which they conduct their family concerns. Parents, let not your religion be simply a profession, but let it become a reality.”

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 317.



## Unity in Diversity

By Tzvetan Petkov, U.S.A.

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-6.

“Like the branches of the True Vine, the Word of God presents unity in diversity. There is in it a perfect, superhuman, mysterious unity.” –*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 53.

Unity is important in the family and in the church of God. Without unity, the mission and the goal of God’s church will be hindered. Unity in the church was the subject of Christ’s prayer in John 17. Unity among the believers is a condition for the outpouring of the latter rain. But such unity cannot be achieved only by human effort; it is a fruit of divine intervention.

### Consecration beautifies individuality

“A life consecrated to the service of God will be developed and beautified in its individuality.” –*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 426.

Some may think that, in order to achieve unity, the individual’s personality has to be sacrificed. But this is not so in spiritual unity. The connection with Christ will never destroy. It will only build up, encourage, and produce growth. “The Lord does not desire that our individuality shall be destroyed; it is not His purpose that any two persons shall be exactly alike in tastes and dispositions. All have characteristics peculiar to themselves, and these are not to be destroyed, but to be trained, molded, fashioned, after the similitude of Christ.” –(Letter 20, 1894) *Our High Calling*, p. 90.

The individuality of the believers will be preserved and developed by divine intervention and will also be seen as very important and necessary. The foundation of character is laid in childhood. Every child needs to be carefully educated and enabled to develop a strong personality and a strong individuality in harmony with God’s Word.

“The training of children must be conducted on a different principle from that which governs the training of irrational animals.... The will must be trained to obey

the dictates of reason and conscience. A child may be so disciplined as to have, like the beast, no will of its own, his individuality being lost in that of his teacher. Such training is unwise, and its effect disastrous. Children thus educated will be deficient in firmness and decision.... A wise instructor will give special attention to the development of the weaker traits, that the child may form a well-balanced, harmonious character.” –*Child Guidance*, p. 39.

Only individuals with strong characters filled with the power of the Holy Spirit will be able to remain faithful in understanding and faith. The pressure from the unbelieving society with which we are surrounded is incredible. We should not set our goals low. The children in the church of God need to be prepared to be not only members but also leaders and preachers of the Word. Church members should follow the faith not because of church order or because of unpleasant consequences but because they have pleasure and joy in their walk with Christ. This is possible only if daily conversion takes place and the Spirit of God keeps our fallen human nature under control.

### Diversity in character—unity in Christ

“From the endless variety of plants and flowers, we may learn an important lesson. All blossoms are not the same in form or color. Some possess healing virtues. Some are always fragrant. There are professing Christians who think it their duty to make every Christian like themselves. This is man’s plan, not the plan of God. In the church of God there is room for characters as varied as are the flowers in a garden. In His spiritual garden there are many varieties of flowers.” –(Letter 95, 1902) *Evangelism*, p. 99.

The church of God is a home for many people. Its members come from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds; they have diverse education and family influences, and their horizon cosmology (their understanding about everything in the world) is unique, differing from that of others. Furthermore, we are all born with different temperaments, and we have different characters. To achieve unity in such an environment is, humanly speaking,

impossible. But “...The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” Luke 18:27. When true conversion takes place and God makes us partakers of His divine nature, this miracle will happen.

“In the apostles of our Lord there was nothing to bring glory to themselves. It was evident that the success of their labors was due only to God. The lives of these men, the characters they developed, and the mighty work that God wrought through them, are a testimony to what He will do for all who are teachable and obedient.” –*Conflict and Courage*, p. 288. Unity also depends on the level of each person’s conversion and consecration. The diversity in temperament, experience, and personality is not to be considered a problem but a necessity for the growth of the community of believers. It was for a purpose that the Lord chose disciples with different types of characters. The differences among us contribute to our development and help us grow in patience, love, and understanding.

### Diversity of gifts—unity in the Spirit

Another miracle that the Lord carries out in the heart and life of the believer is the impartation of the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit of God distributes to every converted believer a unique gift necessary for the spread of the gospel and the spiritual growth of the church. “God has different ways of working, and He has different workmen to whom He entrusts varied gifts. One worker may be a ready speaker; another a ready writer; another may have the gift of sincere, earnest, fervent prayer; another the gift of singing; another may have special power to explain the word of God with clearness. And each gift is to become a power for God, because He works with the laborer. To one God gives the word of wisdom, to another knowledge, to another faith; but all are to work under the same Head. The diversity of gifts leads to a diversity of operations; but ‘it is the same God which worketh all in all.’ 1 Corinthians 12:6.” –*Gospel Workers*, p. 483.

There is no doubt that, in His divine plan, God wants to teach every believer to accept the diversity within the church and to enable him to work with everyone else in united action under the guidance of His Spirit. If unity is not there, it is because the Spirit of God is absent. Instead of joy and friendliness, envy, jealousy, and personality clashes are the natural reactions of the carnal heart. The enemy is trying to destroy the united effort of the church by taking advantage of such sinful tendencies. “The Lord desires His chosen servants to learn how to unite together in harmonious effort. It may seem to some that the contrast between their gifts and the gifts

of a fellow laborer is too great to allow them to unite in harmonious effort; but when they remember that there are varied minds to be reached, and that some will reject the truth as it is presented by one laborer, only to open their hearts to God's truth as it is presented in a different manner by another laborer, they will hopefully endeavor to labor together in unity. Their talents, however diverse, may all be under the control of the same Spirit. In every word and act, kindness and love will be revealed; and as each worker fills his appointed place faithfully, the prayer of Christ for the unity of His followers will be answered, and the world will know that these are His disciples...." —*Evangelism*, pp. 99, 100.

### ***Diversity in ideas and methods— harmony in faith and doctrine***

God is the Creator, and He wants His followers to be open minded and creative. He inspires true believers not only by imparting His gifts but also by sharing a variety of ideas and plans. By applying different ideas and methods, while preserving unity in spirit and in action, the believers will defeat the wiles of the enemy. "The vine has many branches, but though all the branches are different, they do not quarrel. In diversity there is unity. All the branches obtain their nourishment from one source. This is an illustration of the unity that is to exist among Christ's followers." —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 211.

Sometimes leaders in the church are afraid of new initiatives, new technology, and new methods of work. Unfamiliar things often seem scary and suspicious. "On the other hand, the leaders among God's people are to guard against the danger of condemning the methods of individual workers who are led by the Lord to do a special work that but few are fitted to do. Let brethren in responsibility be slow to criticize movements that are not in perfect harmony with their methods of labor. Let them never suppose that every plan should reflect their own personality. Let them not fear to trust another's methods; for by withholding their confidence from a brother laborer who, with humility and consecrated zeal, is doing a special work in God's appointed way, they are retarding the advancement of the Lord's cause." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 488.

However, the diversity of methods, ideas, temperaments, and gifts does not justify a difference in the understanding of faith and doctrine. Those who are connected with Christ and have His Spirit will be taught, reminded, and comforted by the divine presence; and a harmonious understanding of the Scriptures will be the natural result. "The apostles differed widely in habits and disposition. . . . These were brought together, with their different faults, all

with inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil; but in and through Christ they were to dwell in the family of God, learning to become one in faith, in doctrine, in spirit. They would have their tests, their grievances, their differences of opinion; but while Christ was abiding in the heart, there could be no dissension. His love would lead to love for one another; the lessons of the Master would lead to the harmonizing of all differences, bringing the disciples into unity, till they would be of one mind and one judgment. Christ is the great center, and they would approach one another just in proportion as they approached the center." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

### ***Selfishness***

"Love of self, pride, and self-sufficiency lie at the foundation of the greatest trials and discords that have ever existed in the religious world." —*Evangelism*, p. 102.

When we follow our natural tendencies and sinful desires, selfishness is cherished and supported and will grow as a cultivated part of our character. Any kind of selfish desire is against unity and true spiritual harmony. The natural, selfish heart is disturbed when service for others is required; and the selfish mind fights against the tolerance and acceptance of others' ideas. Selfishness craves constant appreciation and praise, which makes the success of others a painful experience. Sometimes selfishness is hidden under a cloak of good works and is difficult to discern. But if selfishness controls the mind and heart, the influence of the Holy Spirit of God will be rejected. "If self had not been so carefully, tenderly cherished, lest it should not find room enough to preserve its native dignity, the Lord could have used these differently constituted characters to do a good work and much larger; for in their diversity of talent, yet unity in Christ, was the power of their usefulness. If, like the diverse branches of the vine, they were centered in the vine stock, all would bear the rich cluster of precious fruit. There would be perfect harmony in their diversity, for they are partakers of the nourishment and fitness of the vine." —*Evangelism*, p. 101.

### ***Striving for supremacy***

The desire for supremacy over others is a natural consequence of deeply ingrained selfishness, and it is the opposite of the character of Jesus Christ. He left heaven to save the fallen human race. "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:8. By contrast, Satan did everything possible to obtain supremacy in heaven.

"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." —(Manuscript 21, 1894) *Evangelism*, p. 102.

Often the desire for supremacy begins by cherishing the idea of self-sufficiency. Without realizing it, one exalts himself when he criticizes the work, ideas, and abilities of others. When criticism turns into a habit, the strife for supremacy is a natural consequence. But "However large may be a man's claim to knowledge and wisdom, unless he is under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, he is exceedingly ignorant of spiritual things. . . . Those who are truly converted will press together in Christian unity." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 485.

When selfishness and desire for supremacy work together, dictatorship is easily developed. Tragic and pitiful is the condition of a person who has indulged such human cravings. "No human being is to seek to bind other human beings to himself, as if he were to control them, telling them to do this, and forbidding them to do that, commanding, dictating, acting like an officer over a company of soldiers. . . . After the truth has made the impression upon hearts, and men and women have accepted its teachings, they are to be treated as the property of Christ, not as the property of man. In fastening minds to yourself, you lead them to disconnect from the Source of their wisdom and sufficiency. Their dependence must be wholly in God; only thus can they grow in grace." —*Gospel Workers*, p. 484.

The problem of strife for supremacy can be observed not only among church leaders but also in families. Marriage is a mirror of a couple's spiritual condition and growth in Christ. "Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control. Do not try to compel each other to yield to your wishes. You cannot do this and retain each other's love. Be kind, patient, and forbearing, considerate, and courteous." —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 361 (1905); *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 425.

The only solution is Jesus Christ. "Christ is the foundation of every true church. We have His unalterable promise that His presence and protection will be given to His faithful ones who walk in His counsel. To the end of time Christ is to be first. He is the

source of life and strength, of righteousness and holiness. And He is all this to those who wear His yoke and learn of Him how to be meek and lowly.” –*Gospel Workers*, p. 485.

## *The spirit of independence*

“The world is filled with strife for the supremacy. The spirit of pulling away from fellow-laborers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. By some, all efforts to establish order are regarded as dangerous, as a restriction of personal liberty, and hence to be feared as popery. These deceived souls regard it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They declare that they will not take any man’s say-so; that they are amenable to no man. I have been instructed that it is Satan’s special effort to lead men to feel that God is pleased to have them choose their own course, independent of the counsel of their brethren.

“Herein lies a grave danger to the prosperity of our work. We must move discreetly, sensibly, in harmony with the judgment of God-fearing counselors; for in this course alone lies our safety and strength. Otherwise God cannot work with us and by us and for us.” –*Gospel Workers*, p. 486.

The enemy makes every effort to sow disunity among God’s people. Every time he is successful, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is dishonored. A waste of time, effort, and precious means and, many times, a loss of souls are the consequences of his work. The enemy uses people as his instruments. Slowly, he plants erroneous ideas in the minds and hearts of those who entertain and cherish his influence. However, when the Lord opens a person’s mind and he sees clearly that he has been used by the enemy, pride generally prevents him from returning and rectifying the harm that has been done. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to cling to the Lord daily and seek the baptism of His Spirit so we will not be separated from His divine presence and protection. Selfishness, the striving for supremacy, and an independent spirit are three human tendencies that have produced division in God’s church and in the family.

“The spasmodic, fitful movements of some who claim to be Christians are well represented by the work of strong but untrained horses. When one pulls forward, another pulls back; at the voice of their master one plunges ahead, and the other stands immovable....” –*Gospel Workers*, p. 487.

“Will organization be necessary in the time of the end?” This is a question that many believers have. “Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man’s being independent.... His people must draw together.” –*Gospel Workers*, p. 487.

## *Press together, press together*

“Again and again the angel has said to me, ‘Press together, press together, be of one mind, of one judgment,’ Christ is the leader, and you are brethren; follow Him.” –*Evangelism*, p. 102.

“The word and Spirit of truth, dwelling in our hearts, will separate us from the world. The immutable principles of truth and love will bind heart to heart, and the strength of the union will be according to the measure of grace and truth enjoyed.” –*God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 211.

The promises of God are yes and Amen. They never fail. Let us pray and work for unity in diversity! “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Matthew 7:7. May God bless His children! Amen!

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Reading 3 – Sunday, December 4, 2011

# *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*

By Alfredo Fisicaro, Chile

The blessing pronounced upon the peacemakers is one of the most beautiful expressions that God has given to His children in His word. We will briefly analyze this phrase containing a great blessing for everyone who will put this truth into practice.

## *Meaning*

The word “blessed” is defined as a synonym for fortunate, glad, happy. In this case it is applicable to “the peacemakers.” The word “peacemaker” comes from the Greek word *eirênopoiós*, which is made up of two words—*eiréné* (peace) and *poiéō* (make)—or, in other words, “make peace.” Let us remember that the word “peace” in Hebrew is *shalom*, a word used by brethren as a fraternal greeting as they leave the church, especially on Sabbath.

The word “peace” has nothing to do with the absence of war but means everything that contributes to man’s well being. In the

East, when someone greets a person with “Peace,” he is wishing him not the absence of problems or difficulties but the enjoyment of all good things.

Good things are generally thought of as material goods or worldly honors, but here the phrase does not mean this. “The people had come to think that happiness consisted in the possession of the things of this world, and that fame and the honor of men were much to be coveted. It was very pleasing to be called ‘Rabbi,’ and to be extolled as wise and religious, having their virtues paraded before the public. This was regarded as the crown of happiness. But in the presence of that vast throng, Jesus declared that earthly gain and honor were all the reward such persons would ever receive.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 305.

## *True peace through Christ’s grace*

In general, this earth’s inhabitants search for peace through economic stability,

international treaties, union of churches, and other means, but rarely through the unique way provided by Heaven to receive this great gift. To change the world, the countries have to change. For the countries to change, the families that compose them must change. For the families to change, each member must change; and for each person to change, there must be a change of heart. “Men cannot manufacture peace. Human plans for the purification and uplifting of individuals or of society will fail of producing peace, because they do not reach the heart. The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension. ‘Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree;’ and life’s desert ‘shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.’... The peace of Christ is born of truth. It is harmony with God. The world is at enmity with the law of God; sinners are at enmity with their Maker; and as a result they are at enmity with one another.” –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 305.

That is why the sinner’s most urgent need is to accept Christ as his Saviour and Lord of his life, enter into a harmonious relationship with God through Jesus, and receive sweet heavenly peace for his soul. “Therefore being

justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1. It is necessary for good to gain the victory over evil in the inner life so the soul will be converted by having the heart given wholly to the Lord. But this is not the end. The life of the peacemaker is just the beginning. It is necessary for the grace of Christ to remain implanted in the heart day after day, year after year, so the soul will be converted every day to the Lord and thus grow in grace, “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 12:14.

“Christ is ‘the Prince of Peace,’ and it is His mission to restore to earth and heaven the peace that sin has broken.... Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace. There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife.” *—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 27, 28.

### Effects and needs of the believer

The result of living in Christ will be bountiful fruits revealed particularly to those who are closest to us. Family members will be the first to witness this conversion and peacemaking. If the members of a family are not converted and do not have a healthy day-to-day spiritual life, they will not be able to be a good example to others.

Each church member needs to overcome through the grace of Christ in his spiritual life. When this happens to each individual member of the Christian family, it will result in unity and a family that will radiate a strong influence wherever it is. Such converted families build strong churches, showing to those who are wandering in darkness the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ, by their practical example. Then the church can accomplish its sacred mission to be the light and salt of the world. The Lord Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Matthew 5:16.

### Damaging testimony

Very negative situations are found in all societies and churches, and the church is no exception. There are members who call themselves Christians although their lives are far from being such. In their words and behavior, they show that they are far from Christ. Their lips are a tempestuous fire. They are surrounded by an influence saturated with problems, bitterness, frustration, and conflict. No matter where they live, they will always be involved in strife, stirring up and irritating others. When they speak, it seems that they cannot be quiet without offending, attacking, or hurting even those who are considered their closest friends. Sometimes they behave with arrogance and provocation. They cannot live in peace. They are irascible and often offended. They are very sensitive to what others say while they are totally insensitive in their own use of words; they have a perfect memory of what others may have done to them and virtually none about what they have done to others. There are persons who manifest such a discontented, murmuring spirit concerning many things that happen to them that they cannot reveal the light of the Sun of Righteousness shining in their everyday life. Instead, they live in the gloom of this world, discontented and making life difficult for themselves and those around them. They testify that serving the Lord is a heavy load, giving the impression that if they could get rid of Christ’s yoke they would do so. Instead of making peace, which is God’s work, they do the biddings of the enemy.

To such I would like to say that there is hope in Jesus; it is not just possible but imperative that we live authentic Christianity in the Lord. When one is far from Him, life is difficult and the trumpet will give an uncertain sound. “In every act of life Christians should seek to represent Christ—seek to make His service appear attractive. Let none make religion repulsive by groans and sighs and a relation of their trials, their self-denials, and sacrifices. Do not give the lie to your profession of faith by impatience, fretfulness, and repining. Let the graces of the Spirit be manifested in kindness, meekness, forbearance, cheerfulness, and love. Let it be seen that the love of Christ is an abiding motive; that your religion is not a dress to be put off and on to suit circumstances, but a principle—calm, steady, unwavering. Alas that pride, unbelief, and selfishness, like a foul cancer, are eating out vital godliness from the heart of many a professed Christian!” *—That I May Know Him*, p. 167.

We need the Lord Jesus Christ urgently in our lives. We need to be born again. We need to give our lives to Christ so we can

live to the full a fruitful, abundant, and healthy Christian life through the working of the Holy Spirit. “Christ’s followers are sent to the world with the message of peace. Whoever, by the quiet, unconscious influence of a holy life, shall reveal the love of Christ; whoever, by word or deed, shall lead another to renounce sin and yield his heart to God, is a peacemaker. And ‘blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’ The spirit of peace is evidence of their connection with heaven. The sweet savor of Christ surrounds them. The fragrance of the life, the loveliness of the character, reveal to the world the fact that they are children of God. Men take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. ‘Everyone that loveth is born of God.’ ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His;’ but ‘as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ 1 John 4:7; Romans 8:9, 14.” *—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 28.

“And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.” Micah 5:7.

### Blessing upon those who make peace

Jesus’ words express a blessing for the peacemakers, or those who restore calm, but not for those who only love peace. There is a big difference between loving peace and being a peacemaker.

We need to love peace in the correct way to become a peacemaker. For example, if there is a dangerous situation and one assumes a self-defensive attitude, doing nothing to do achieve peace, there is no peacemaking but a gathering up of problems for the future; situations are not made better, and appropriate measures are not taken. The peace about which God’s Word speaks and which is called a blessing resolves difficulties, instead of avoiding them. True peace is proactive, facing situations and “making peace,” standing courageously when there is a conflict.

There was a man among the people of Israel who was blessed and protected by David’s men while they were staying in Carmel, a place near the city of Maon in Judah. When these men asked for his help with their food, their request was refused by this man—Nabal, whose name meant “fool.” David could have taken directly what he needed, but his request was made with honor and respect. We find this story in 1 Samuel 25. Nabal did not recognize David’s kindness, and he refused to help, answering with denial and disrespect. David was indignant, and he reacted by planning to go and kill Nabal and all the men of his household.

Now a woman peacemaker took action. Having been told about the situation by one of her servants, and without consulting with her husband, Nabal's wife took two hundred loaves, two bottles of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched corn, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, put everything on donkeys, and quickly rode to meet David. Abigail approached David with reverence suitable for a king. "With kind words she sought to soothe his irritated feelings, and she pleaded with him in behalf of her husband. With nothing of ostentation or pride, but full of the wisdom and love of God, Abigail revealed the strength of her devotion to her household; and she made it plain to David that the unkind course of her husband was in no wise premeditated against him as a personal affront, but was simply the outburst of an unhappy and selfish nature." – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 666.

She pleaded for the lives of her husband and her household. She asked for forgiveness as if she herself had committed the sin, not her husband. She offered what her husband had refused. "These words could

have come only from the lips of one who had partaken of the wisdom from above. The piety of Abigail, like the fragrance of a flower, breathed out all unconsciously in face and word and action. The Spirit of the Son of God was abiding in her soul. Her speech, seasoned with grace, and full of kindness and peace, shed a heavenly influence. Better impulses came to David, and he trembled as he thought what might have been the consequences of his rash purpose. 'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.' Matthew 5:9. Would that there were many more like this woman of Israel, who would soothe the irritated feelings, prevent rash impulses, and quell great evils by words of calm and well-directed wisdom.

"A consecrated Christian life is ever shedding light and comfort and peace. It is characterized by purity, tact, simplicity, and usefulness. It is controlled by that unselfish love that sanctifies the influence. It is full of Christ, and leaves a track of light wherever its possessor may go." – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 667.

"Deal gently with human beings. With hearts full of spiritual tenderness, melt your way into convicted hearts. Let your words be dipped in the heavenly oil from the two olive branches. We need the golden oil emptied into prepared vessels, that it may be communicated to those who are seeking for the truth. Ever remember that it is 'not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.' (Letter 200, 1899)..."

"For Christ's sake do not speak or think evil. May the Lord help us not only to read the Bible, but to practice its teachings. The human agent who is faithful in his work, who unites gentleness with his power, justice with his love, causes rejoicing among the heavenly intelligences, and glorifies God. Let us strive earnestly to be good and to do good, and we shall receive the crown of life that fadeth not away." – (MS 116, 1898) *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, pp. 440, 439.

May the Lord give us His divine care so we will be men and women who not only love peace but "make peace." Amen.

Reading 4 – Tuesday, December 6, 2011

## That All May Be One

By Parmenas Shirima, Tanzania

“**A**nd for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which 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.” John 17:19-21.

Christ prayed for us as His followers. We may know from His words what He wanted us to achieve in our Christian experience. He wants Christians to be one, in perfect unity, even as He is one with the Father. This is a deep and serious lesson that we need to study and implement.

### Motivating factors which produce unity

In Amos 3:3, we are given one of the factors which work for unity. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Since the unity or oneness that is mentioned here is a lasting one—which means for time present and for eternity—we need to think deeply about the unity referred to the Saviour's prayer. These essential factors are brotherly love, the same spirit, and harmonious actions or deeds to be manifested at home and in church fellowship.

**Love.** "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love." John 15:9. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." Ephesians 5:1, 2. In these statements, we see the role of love as a motivating factor for unity. Read the following verse as well: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." 1 John 4:7-11.

**The same spirit:** "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Ephesians 4:3, 4. The Spirit referred to here is the Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost. God's people must be actuated by the same spirit, even the Spirit of

God. No true unity exists where people are led by different spirits. In such a situation, there will always be a conflict of spirits. This also explains why we sometimes have quarrels and misunderstandings at home and in the church. Let us examine the spirits. Consider these statements again: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." 1 Corinthians 14:32; 2:12, 13; 6:17; 14:15.

**Harmonious actions or deeds.** Following is an illustration of how unity is achieved: "Years ago, when the company of believers in the soon coming of Christ was very small, the Sabbathkeepers at Topsham, Maine, met for worship in the large kitchen in the home of Brother Stockbridge Howland. One Sabbath morning Brother Howland was absent. We were surprised at this, because he was always so punctual. Soon he came in, his face aglow, shining with the glory of God. 'Brethren,' he said, 'I have found it. I have found that we can pursue a course of action regarding which the guarantee of God's word is: "Ye shall never fall." I am going to tell you about it.'

“He then told us that he had noticed that one brother, a poor fisherman, had been feeling that he was not as highly respected as he ought to be and that Brother Howland and others thought themselves above him. This was not true, but it seemed true to him; and for several weeks he had not attended the meetings. So Brother Howland went to his house and knelt before him, saying: ‘My brother, forgive me. What is it that I have done?’ The man took him by the arm and tried to raise him to his feet. ‘No,’ said Brother Howland, ‘what have you against me?’ ‘I have nothing against you.’ ‘But you must have,’ said Brother Howland, ‘because once we could speak to one another, but now you do not speak to me at all, and I want to know what is the matter.’

“‘Get up, Brother Howland,’ he said. ‘No,’ said Brother Howland, ‘I will not.’ ‘Then I must get down,’ he said, and he fell on his knees, and confessed how childish he had been and how many evil surmisings he had cherished. ‘And now,’ he said, ‘I will put them all away.’

“As Brother Howland told this story, his face shone with the glory of the Lord. Just as he had finished, the fisherman and his family came in, and we had an excellent meeting.

“Suppose that some of us should follow the course pursued by Brother Howland. If when our brethren surmise evil, we would go to them, saying, ‘Forgive me if I have done anything to harm you,’ we might break the spell of Satan and set our brethren free from their temptations. Do not let anything interpose between you and your brethren. If there is anything that you can do by sacrifice to clear away the rubbish of suspicion, do it. God wants us to love one another as brethren. He wants us to be pitiful and courteous. He wants us to educate ourselves to believe that our brethren love us, and to believe that Christ loves us. Love begets love.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 191-193.

### ***In unity there is strength***

“Strive earnestly for unity. Pray for it, work for it. It will bring spiritual health, elevation of thought, nobility of character, heavenly-mindedness, enabling you to overcome selfishness and evil surmisings, and to be more than conquerors through Him that loved you and gave Himself for you. Crucify self; esteem others better than yourselves. Thus you will be brought into oneness with Christ. Before the heavenly universe, and before the church and the world, you will bear unmistakable evidence that you are God’s sons and daughters. God will be glorified in the example that you set.

“The world needs to see worked out before it the miracle that binds the hearts of God’s people together in Christian love. It needs to see the Lord’s people sitting together in heavenly places in Christ. Will you not give in your lives an evidence of what the truth of God can do for those who love and serve Him? God knows what you can be. He knows what divine grace can do for you if you will be partakers of the divine nature.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 188.

“I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” 1 Corinthians 1:10.

“Union is strength; division is weakness. When those who believe present truth are united, they exert a telling influence. Satan well understands this. Never was he more determined than now to make of none effect the truth of God by causing bitterness and dissension among the Lord’s people.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 236.

### ***Dedicated and determined revival through prayer***

“By prayer and confession of sin we must clear the King’s highway. As we do this, the power of the Spirit will come to us. We need the Pentecostal energy. This will come, for the Lord has promised to send His Spirit as the all-conquering power.

“Perilous times are before us. Everyone who has a knowledge of the truth should awake and place himself, body, soul, and spirit, under the discipline of God. The enemy is on our track. We must be wide awake, on our guard against him. We must put on the whole armor of God. We must follow the directions given through the spirit of prophecy. We must love and obey the truth for this time.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 297, 298.

“Christ is one with the Father, but Christ and God are two distinct personages. Read the prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter of John, and you will find this point clearly brought out. How earnestly the Saviour prayed that His disciples might be one with Him as He is one with the Father. But the unity that is to exist between Christ and His followers does not destroy the personality of either. They are to be one with Him as He is one with the Father.” —*Review and Herald*, June 1, 1905.

“The unity that exists between Christ and His disciples does not destroy the personality of either. In mind, in purpose, in character, they are one, but not in person. By

partaking of the Spirit of God, conforming to the law of God, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ brings His disciples into a living union with Himself and with the Father. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, man is made complete in Christ Jesus. 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 (Manuscript 111, 1903). —*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 286.

### ***A united front in the family***

“And He answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Matthew 19:4-6.

“**Unity, love, and peace.** Let fathers and mothers make a solemn promise to God, whom they profess to love and obey, that by His grace they will not disagree between themselves, but will in their own life and temper manifest the spirit that they wish their children to cherish.

“Parents should be careful not to allow the spirit of dissension to creep into the home; for this is one of Satan’s agents to make his impression on the character. If parents will strive for unity in the home by inculcating the principles that governed the life of Christ, dissension will be driven out, and unity and love will abide there. Parents and children will partake of the gift of the Holy Spirit....

“**The secret of family unity.** The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.

“Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another.

“Thus it is in the Christian life. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. God is glorified as His people unite in harmonious action....

“Unitedly and prayerfully the father and mother should bear the grave responsibility of guiding their children aright.

“Parents are to work together as a unit. There must be no division. But many parents work at cross-purposes, and thus the

children are spoiled by mismanagement.... It sometimes happens that, of the mother and father, one is too indulgent and the other too severe. This difference works against good results in the formation of the characters of their children. No harsh force is to be exercised in carrying out reforms, but at the same time no weak indulgence must be shown. The mother is not to seek to blind the eyes of the father to the faults of the children, neither is she to influence them to do those things which the father has forbidden them to do. Not one seed of doubt should the mother plant in her children's minds in regard to the wisdom of the father's management. She should not, by her course of action, counteract the work of the father." —*The Adventist Home*, pp. 178, 179, 312.

**Union with Christ and brotherly love in the church.** "It is the purpose of God that His children shall blend in unity. Do they not expect to live together in the same heaven? Is Christ divided against Himself? Will He give His people success before they sweep away the rubbish of evil surmising and discord, before the laborers, with unity of purpose, devote heart and mind and strength to the work so holy in God's sight? Union brings strength; disunion, weakness. United with one another, working together in harmony for the salvation of men, we shall indeed be 'laborers together with God.' Those who refuse to work in harmony greatly dishonor God. The enemy of souls delights to see them working at cross purposes with one another. Such ones need to cultivate brotherly love and tenderness of heart. If they could draw aside the curtain veiling the future and see the result of their disunion they would surely be led to repent.

"The world is looking with gratification at the disunion amongst Christians. Infidelity is well pleased. God calls for a change among His people. Union with Christ and with one another is our only safety in these last days. Let us not make it possible for Satan to point to our church members, saying: 'Behold how these people, standing under the banner of Christ, hate one another. We have nothing to fear from them while they spend more strength fighting one another than in warfare with my forces.'

"After the descent of the Holy Spirit the disciples went forth to proclaim a risen Saviour, their one desire the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of the communion with saints. They were tender, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth's sake. In their daily association with one another they revealed the love that Christ had commanded them to reveal. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts.

"The believers were ever to cherish the love that filled the hearts of the apostles

after the descent of the Holy Spirit. They were to go forward in willing obedience to the new commandment: 'As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.' John 13:34. So closely were they to be united to Christ that they would be enabled to fulfill His requirements. The power of a Saviour who could justify them by His righteousness was to be magnified.

"But the early Christians began to look for defects in one another. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and of the great love He had revealed for sinners. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory of the faith, more severe in their criticisms. In their zeal to condemn others they forgot their own errors. They forgot the lesson of brotherly love that Christ had taught. And, saddest of all, they were unconscious of their loss. They did not realize that happiness and joy were going out of their lives, and that soon they would walk in darkness, having shut the love of God out of their hearts.

"The apostle John realized that brotherly love was waning in the church, and he dwelt particularly upon this point. Up to the day of his death he urged upon believers the constant exercise of love for one another. His letters to the churches are filled with this thought. 'Beloved, let us love one another,' he writes; 'for love is of God.... God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.... Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.' 1 John 4:7-11.

"In the church of God today brotherly love is greatly lacking. Many of those who profess to love the Saviour neglect to love those who are united with them in Christian fellowship. We are of the same faith, members of one family, all children of the same heavenly Father, with the same blessed hope of immortality. How close and tender should be the tie that binds us together. The people of the world are watching us to see if our faith is exerting a sanctifying influence upon our hearts. They are quick to discern every defect in our lives, every inconsistency in our actions. Let us give them no occasion to reproach our faith." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 240-242.

### ***Harmony and union are our strongest witness***

"It is not the opposition of the world that endangers us the most; it is the evil cherished in the hearts of professed believers that works our most grievous disaster and most retards the progress of God's cause. There is no surer way of weakening our spirituality than by being envious, suspicious of one another, full of faultfinding and evil surmising. 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is

earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.' James 3:15-18.

"Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ's command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will. Then we shall work together without a thought of collision.

"Little differences dwelt upon lead to actions that destroy Christian fellowship. Let us not allow the enemy thus to gain the advantage over us. Let us keep drawing nearer to God and to one another. Then we shall be as trees of righteousness, planted by the Lord, and watered by the river of life. And how fruitful we shall be! Did not Christ say: 'Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit'? John 15:8....

"When Christ's prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God's people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us....

"It is not a great number of institutions, large buildings, and outward display that God requires, but the harmonious action of a peculiar people, a people chosen by God and precious, united with one another, their life hid with Christ in God. Every man is to stand in his lot and place, exerting a right influence in thought, word, and deed. When all God's workers do this, and not till then, His work will be a complete, symmetrical whole....

"The Lord calls for men of genuine faith and sound minds, men who recognize the distinction between the true and the false. Each one should be on his guard, studying and practicing the lessons given in the seventeenth chapter of John, and preserving a living faith in the truth for this time. We need that self-control which will enable us to bring our habits into harmony with the prayer of Christ....

"The heart of the Saviour is set upon His followers' fulfilling God's purpose

in all its height and depth. They are to be one in Him, even though they are scattered the world over. But God cannot make them one in Christ unless they are willing to give up their own way for His way.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 242, 243, 183, 239, 243.

“If Christians were to act in concert, moving forward as one, under the direction of one Power, for the accomplishment of one purpose, they would move the world.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 221.

However, “We are to unify, but not on a platform of error.” —(Special Testimonies, Series B, No 2, p. 47) *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15, p. 259.

“My attention was then turned to the company I had seen, who were mightily shaken. I was shown those whom I had before seen weeping and praying in agony of spirit. The company of guardian angels around them had been doubled, and they were clothed with an armor from their head to their feet. They moved in exact order, like a company of soldiers.” —*Early Writings*, p. 271.

### ***Self-centeredness, a hindrance to unity in the church***

“In the establishment of institutions in new fields it is often necessary to place responsibilities upon persons not fully acquainted with the details of the work. These persons labor at great disadvantage, and, unless they and their fellow workers have an unselfish interest in the Lord’s institution, there will result a condition of things that will hinder its prosperity.

“Many feel that the line of work they are doing belongs solely to them and that no one else should make any suggestions in regard to it. These very ones may be ignorant as to the best methods of conducting the work; yet, if one ventures to offer them advice, they are offended and become more determined to follow their independent judgment. Again,

some of the workers are not willing to help or instruct their fellow workmen. Others who are inexperienced do not wish their ignorance to be known. They make mistakes, at a cost of much time and material, because they are too proud to ask counsel.

“The cause of the trouble it is not difficult to determine. The workers have been independent threads, when they should have regarded themselves as threads that must be woven together to help form the pattern.

“These things grieve the Holy Spirit. God desires us to learn of one another. Unsanctified independence places us where He cannot work with us. With such a state of things Satan is well pleased....

“Every worker will be tested as to whether he is laboring for the advancement of the Lord’s institution, or to serve his own interests....

“The sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion, self-conceit. This stands in the way of all growth. When a man has defects of character, yet fails of realizing this; when he is so imbued with self-sufficiency that he cannot see his fault, how can he be cleansed? ‘They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.’ Matthew 9:12. How can one improve when he thinks his ways perfect?...

“None but a wholehearted Christian can be a true gentleman.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 197-200.

### ***Let us pray earnestly for true unity***

Since we are too victimized by the problem of selfishness, we need to look to Jesus by faith for help in this regard. He knows our situation, for He said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.” John 15:5. During this special week of prayer, let us unitedly set our minds to plead for unity in our

homes as well as in the church. Since this is the will of God, we have the assurance that He will answer our request. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6, 7.

“There are few who rightly appreciate or improve the precious privilege of prayer. We should go to Jesus and tell Him all our needs. We may bring Him our little cares and perplexities as well as our greater troubles. Whatever arises to disturb or distress us, we should take it to the Lord in prayer. When we feel that we need the presence of Christ at every step, Satan will have little opportunity to intrude his temptations. It is his studied effort to keep us away from our best and most sympathizing friend. We should make no one our confidant but Jesus. We can safely commune with Him of all that is in our hearts.

“Brethren and sisters, when you assemble for social worship, believe that Jesus meets with you; believe that He is willing to bless you. Turn the eye away from self; look unto Jesus, talk of His matchless love. By beholding Him you will become changed into His likeness. When you pray, be brief, come right to the point. Do not preach the Lord a sermon in your long prayers. Ask for the bread of life as a hungry child asks bread of his earthly father. God will bestow upon us every needed blessing if we ask Him in simplicity and faith....

“Prayer is the most holy exercise of the soul. It should be sincere, humble, earnest—the desires of a renewed heart breathed in the presence of a holy God. When the suppliant feels that he is in the divine presence, self will be forgotten. He will have no desire to display human talent; he will not seek to please the ear of men, but to obtain the blessing which the soul craves.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 200, 201. Amen.

“The heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences.”

—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

## Unity that Makes Strength

By Orlando Florez, Colombia

“**T**hat 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.” John 17:21.

The daily happenings in the world show us the work of Satan: religious, social, economic and political divisions; divisions that lead to rebellion, violence, theft and wars, and which are bringing about the crisis foretold by the prophets of old, the final crisis.

We read, “As we approach the last crisis, it is of vital moment that harmony and unity exist among the Lord’s instrumentalities. The world is filled with storm and war and variance. Yet under one head—the papal power—the people will unite to oppose God in the person of His witnesses. This union is cemented by the great apostate.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 182.

In the parable of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11-32, we see that, as in Eden, Satan broke the unity with the Eternal Father and turned man into the prodigal son far from God through his rebellion of wanting to do his own will. Tearing apart the harmony of a home that had lost a member, the young man made his decision to travel far, but not before asking in advance for his inheritance, to live profligately spending his means and harming his life and health. Living a life lost in prostitution, eating unhealthy foods and drinking alcohol, he ended up destitute and homeless, far from the society of his family. In the end, the prodigal son who had left his father’s house found himself without any means of livelihood, without money, without work, without love, without any prospects for life. Like stagnant water, he began to rot and die until by the grace of God he came to himself and in his heart the desire was awakened to return to the home he had left behind.

### Unity with God

How can it be achieved? According to Eliphaz, it is through becoming friends with God. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.” Job 22:21.

Not only for the son of the parable, but for all the prodigal sons who wish to be restored to liberty, it is necessary to return to the home where a loving father awaits them, ready to provide all possible means to

restore the identity marred by sin, to cover the filthiness, misery and nakedness with His robe of love, to offer food and drink that satisfies hunger and thirst and combats weakness. The Father is waiting for him by organizing a joyous feast for his family’s restoration, restoring his son’s rightful standing in the family, giving him shoes so that he may walk more comfortably, leaving in the past his life of destitution where sin had taken him.

### Avoid Disagreement

In verses 25 to 32 of Luke 15, physician and evangelist Luke tells us about the older brother who did not want to participate in the joy of the return of his brother and did not accept the reason presented by his father who reminded him that his brother had been lost and dead but now is found and alive. This story shows that there are various types of disagreement and we have several quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy in order to prepare ourselves not to have the spirit of the older brother.

“It has been the continual endeavor of the enemy to introduce into the church persons who assent to much that is truth, but who are not converted. Professed Christians who are false to their trust are channels through whom Satan works. He can use unconverted church members to advance his own ideas and retard the work of God. Their influence is always on the side of wrong. They place criticism and doubt as stumbling blocks in the way of reform. They introduce unbelief because they have closed their eyes to the righteousness of Christ and have not the glory of the Lord as their rearward. Unity is the strength of the church. Satan knows this, and he employs his whole force to bring in dissension. He desires to see a lack of harmony among the members of the church of God. Greater attention should be given to the subject of unity. What is the recipe for the cure of the leprosy of strife and dissension? Obedience to the commandments of God.” —*Selected Messages*, Book 2, pp. 159, 160.

“God’s people are not to be in confusion, lacking order and harmony, consistency and beauty. The Lord is greatly dishonored when disunion exists among His people. Truth is a unit. The unity that God requires must be cultivated day by day if we would answer the prayer of Christ. The disunion that is striving for existence among

those who profess to believe the last message of mercy to be given to the world, must find no place; for it would be a fearful hindrance to the advancement of God’s work. His servants are to be one, as Christ is one with the Father; their powers, illuminated, inspired, and sanctified, must be united to make a complete whole. Those who love God and keep His commandments are not to draw apart; they are to press together.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 174, 175.

“One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ’s school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls.” —*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, p. 266.

### Various Organs Form a Single Body

One of the most appropriate images representing unity is surely that of the human body. Every body has different organs each with its specific attributes in order to fulfill its various functions. The hand is different from the foot, and the arm is different from the legs. Eyes have a different function than the ears, and the mouth has a different function than the nose. The heart acts as the engine of this wonderful machinery, and is still different from the brain, which is one of the other great wonders with which the Creator has endowed human beings! What more can we say about the different bones, each one very different from another in size, shape and function. And of the different muscles and tissues? Yet, despite such diversity of nature, characteristics and functions, all these organs work together in perfect harmony and form a unified body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ... For the body is not one member, but many... But now are they many members, yet but one body.” 1 Corinthians 12:12, 14, 20.

Can we then say that because they are different there must of necessity exist conflicts

between the various organs, or that one organ does not need the other? Can one imagine that the foot does not need the brain, nor the hand the heart? Of course not! "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." 1 Corinthians 12:21. They are different and have different functions, but they are still closely linked and work together for the life of the body which is indispensable to the life of each one of them. It is exactly the same in the family and in the church.

### ***Diversity of Gifts and Unity***

This is also the case with spiritual gifts; there is diversity, but in spite of this, there is unity and all contribute their part to the progress of the work.

"In all the Lord's arrangements, there is nothing more beautiful than His plan of giving to men and women a diversity of gifts. The church is His garden, adorned with a variety of trees, plants, and flowers. He does not expect the hyssop to assume the proportions of the cedar, nor the olive to reach the height of the stately palm. Many have received but a limited religious and intellectual training, but God has a work for this class to do if they will labor in humility, trusting in Him." –Letter 122, 1902. *Evangelism*, pp. 98, 99.

"In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these disciples, differing so widely in natural characteristics, in training, and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to the Father, "that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." –*Education*, p. 86.

We all need others' help. God works on other minds besides our own. The various gifts given to different individuals should be combined "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:12, 13.

### ***Different Temperaments and Harmony***

"Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ's command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will." –*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 210.

"The prayer of Christ to His Father, contained in the seventeenth chapter of John, is to be our church creed. It shows us that our difference and disunion are dishonoring to God. Read the whole chapter, verse by verse." –Manuscript 12, 1899. –*Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 21.

### ***Unity between parents is necessary***

"Husband and wife are to be closely united in their work in the home school. They are to be very tender and very guarded in their speech, lest they open a door of temptation through which Satan will enter to obtain victory after victory. They are to be kind and courteous to each other, acting in such a way that they can respect one another. Each is to help the other to bring into the home a pleasant, wholesome atmosphere. They should not differ in the presence of their children. Christian dignity is ever to be preserved." –*Child Guidance*, p. 24.

### ***Persecution Leads to Unity among God's People***

In the days of the apostolic church, in face of the coming danger, the disciples felt the need of surrendering in unity of praying one for another to be saved from the enemy. It was exactly when they were thus united in prayer that the great blessing of the Holy Spirit came upon them. Luke relates thus this wonderful experience: "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the Son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren... And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." Acts 1:13, 14; 2:1, 2.

The Pen of Inspiration comments: "As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief... The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship." –*Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 36, 37.

"It was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out." –*Last Day Events*, p. 184.

"Notice that it was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. They were of one

accord. All differences had been put away. And the testimony borne of them after the Spirit had been given is the same. Mark the word: 'The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.' The Spirit of Him who died that sinners might live, animated the entire congregation of believers." –*Evangelism*, pp. 698, 699.

The Spirit of Prophecy writes that the same will happen with the people of God in the time of the end. "When the storm of persecution really breaks upon us, the true sheep will hear the true Shepherd's voice. Self-denying efforts will be put forth to save the lost, and many who have strayed from the fold will come back to follow the great Shepherd. The people of God will draw together and present to the enemy a united front. In view of the common peril strife for supremacy will cease, there will be no disputing as to who shall be accounted greatest." –*Last Day Events*, p. 152.

Let us pray, dear brothers and sisters around the world, that we may be able to respond positively to the prayer of Christ and to see the church united to fulfill its mission to the perishing world. May the Lord bless us! Amen.

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**“The Lord designs that the families on earth shall be symbols of the family in heaven.”**

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(The Adventist Home, p. 306).

# Unity in the Truth

By Henry Dering, U.S.A.

As the end of the world draws near, Satan's temptations are becoming more powerful, and his attacks against the people of God more bitter and determined. If we are to withstand the enemy's fierce attacks and be successful in our Christian witness to the world, it is of the highest importance that we cultivate love and unity. And the history of Christianity proves conclusively that in union only is there strength, for this unity binds men to God by the golden cords of love.

"Our only hope of reaching heaven is to be one with Christ, and then, in and through Christ, we shall be one with one another. No one is called to walk alone. In Christ life and immortality are brought to light. He has opened the way to the kingdom of heaven to those who believe in Him, but He assigns to no one a path different to that which all must travel. He calls for unity, and unity we must have." –Our Father Cares, p. 264; *The Upward Look*, p. 141.

One of the apostle Paul's noblest utterances concerning the faith that alone could restore to man peace and unity is found in his epistle to the Ephesians. In it he urges upon all the highest character and conduct for the purpose of unity, not only in doctrine and organization, but in Christ the head, and in the church, the mystical body of Christ. Paul is writing to a church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, Asians and Europeans, slaves and freemen—all symbols of a disrupted world that was to be restored to unity in Christ. The letter is most relevant to the church of today, because in it Paul answers the question, What does Christianity have to say regarding the relations of the individual to the family, of the family to the nation, of the nation to the race, and of all to the church and to God?

In Ephesians 4:1-6 we read: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Let us now analyze these seven essential components of Christian unity that we must attain so that the world might know that God indeed sent His Son into the world to save sinners.

## 1. One body

To the Jews, the concept of the church as the body of Christ was startling. The amazing mystery of the church is that "through the Gospel the Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews, part of the same body, sharers together in the promise made in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 3:6 NEB. This was a mystery completely hidden from the sons of men in past generations. Ephesians 3:5, 9. The Israelites who were true followers of God always believed they alone were God's chosen people. (Deuteronomy 7:6). Accepting Gentiles on an equal status was extremely difficult for them and caused many disputes among Jewish believers and Gentile converts.

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." 1 Corinthians 12:12, 25-27.

When the love of God is ours through faith in His Son, a connection with Christ will mean everything to us. We are to be one with Him as He is with the Father and will be beloved by God as members of the body of Christ. Christ is the glorified Head, and His love is communicated to those who are united to Him, inspiring the soul with gratitude and freeing it from pride, vanity, and selfishness.

Unity of God's church—the body of Christ—will fulfill His prayer recorded in John 17:21.

"All differences, all fault-finding must be put away through the grace of Christ which you receive through faith. All envy, all jealousy, all evil surmising, is of the enemy. All evil-speaking, all bitterness, all impatience, all malice, must be purged from the soul temple, and kindness, compassion, forbearance, meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, hope, love, must be cherished every day in order that you may fulfill the prayer of Christ to His Father that His disciples might be one as He is one with the Father." –*Testimonies to Southern Africa*, p. 30.

God's great desire is for His people to maintain unity both within the family and the church. This is an ongoing

process. "If we have unity in the church, we must first have it in the home; for it is from the home that the church is formed, and the tempers and dispositions displayed in the family circle are the tempers and dispositions found in the church." –*The Review and Herald*, July 2, 1889.

A story is told about a startling exhibit in Del Mar, California. A man took a glass beaker which had a small neck but was enlarged to about seven inches in diameter below the neck. The beaker would hold about a quart. The man used the glass beaker as a hammer to drive a spike into a wooden plank. The glass was so well tempered that the beaker did not break. The man then took a small steel marble or bearing the size of a pea and holding it at the neck of the beaker, dropped it inside. When it struck the bottom, the glass was shattered and the beaker was broken from within. The church—the family of God—when perfectly united and tempered together with love, can resist the heaviest of blows from the outside. But just a small force on the inside can destroy this unity and harmony.

As we grasp this truth that the church is the body of Christ, we are encouraged and inspired, and we lift our hearts in praise and thanks to Him who died for us that we may be one!

## 2. One Spirit

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." John 14:16, 17.

A false or counterfeit spirit brings division, unrest, and a multitude of lethal problems; but when the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer's heart, there will be interconnectedness among us. And it is the gift of the Holy Spirit that produces Christian unity. It is our duty and privilege to submit ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit to obtain and preserve the unity which God so graciously gives us.

"The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith.

"When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us." –*Counsels for the Church*, p. 45; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 243.

Standing near the end of time, we need to ask in faith for the promised blessing of the latter rain. Let us put away all dissension and give ourselves to God for the saving of the lost, because unity must precede the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

## 3. One hope

"One of the most solemn and yet most glorious truths revealed in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to complete the great work of redemption. To God's

pilgrim people, so long left to sojourn in 'the region and shadow of death,' a precious, joy-inspiring hope is given in the promise of His appearing, who is 'the resurrection and the life,' to 'bring home again His banished.' The doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures. From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise. Holy men of old looked forward to the advent of the Messiah in glory, as the consummation of their hope." *—The Great Controversy*, p. 299.

Before His departure, Christ promised His disciples that He would return to this earth. Here are His thrilling words of assurance spoken to His disciples and echoing down the ages to us today. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 14:1-3. As this promise gave them courage for the present and hope for the future, it does the same for us. And this wonderful hope will also be a means of drawing together God's family on earth.

As we look forward to Jesus' glorious appearing to put an end to all suffering, pain, sorrow, and death, the wondrous restoration of all that sin has despoiled (Revelation 21:4, 5), and being touched by God's fathomless love and grace, we will not live to please ourselves—"for even Christ pleased not Himself"—but to be a blessing to our neighbor, "to strengthen him and build him up spiritually." "Now may the God Who gives the power of patient endurance (steadfastness) and who supplies encouragement, grant you to live in such mutual harmony and such full sympathy with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus." Romans 15:2, 3, 5 (Amplified version).

The hope for the future is very real. It comforts our hearts and gives us joy to believe and claim by faith the promises of God. Because of the blessed hope, positive changes in attitudes, thinking, and habits begin to transform our lives. First the individual, then the family, and then the church becomes more loving and lovable. Praying and harmonious families transfer their healthy atmosphere into the church. It is the hope in Christ that makes the difference. "Sanctification, unity, peace—all are to be ours through the truth. The belief of the truth does not make men gloomy and uncomfortable. If you have peace in Christ, His precious blood is speaking pardon and hope to your soul. Yes, more, you have joy in the Holy Spirit, through accepting the precious promises." *—Our High Calling*, p. 329; *Review and Herald*, April 12, 1892 par. 20.

I believe the grandest hope of all is to meet Jesus face to face. Restored men and women in a restored earth, with all traces of sin gone—this is the certain hope of the born-again child of God. Dear brothers and sisters around the world, Jesus offers

you hope that no one else can offer. His promises are sure and trustworthy.

#### 4. One Lord

There is one God, and He alone has the right to rule over all humanity. He created all things, and by virtue of this act He has power and authority over everything on the earth. His subjects owe the Lord their loyalty, and those who give their complete allegiance to the same Lord are not at enmity with one another. He is their Lord and Master by creation and redemption, and all authority rests with Him. He requires their total surrender, and to the Christian, that is a source of great joy. "We do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." 1 John 2:3.

#### 5. One faith

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12.

A father had a family of sons who were perpetually quarreling among themselves. When he failed to heal their disputes by his exhortations, he determined to give them a practical illustration of the evils of disunion; and for this purpose he one day told them to bring him a bundle of sticks. When they had done so, he placed the bundle into the hands of each of them in succession, and ordered them to break it in pieces. They tried with all their strength and were not able to do it. He next opened the bundle, took the sticks separately, one by one, and again put them into his sons' hands, upon which they broke them easily. He then addressed them in these words: "My sons, if you are of one mind, and unite to assist each other, you will be as this bundle, uninjured by all the attempts of your enemies; but if you are divided among yourselves, you will be broken as easily as these sticks." "... A threefold cord is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12. The wise Solomon here expresses the truth that in union there is strength.

The apostle Paul entreated the followers of Jesus to come into "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:13. He then encouraged the believers to look forward to the time when Christ would "present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;... holy and without blemish." Ephesians 5:27.

May we never lose sight of this goal—the glorious vision of a holy church!

#### 6. One baptism

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:13.

"Baptism by water aptly symbolizes death and resurrection. Also, it signifies cleansing and separation, and is a public announcement of union with the body of Christ. Those thus initiated into the visible church grow together into the likeness of Christ's death and resurrection." *—Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1022.

2011 will soon end, and I would like to take this opportunity to make an earnest and solemn appeal to all to repent and be truly converted, sealing publicly your surrender to Christ in baptism. And as the believer is buried with Christ in baptism and raised in the likeness of His resurrection, he lives a new life, one bound up with the life of Christ; and he becomes part of God's family on earth. And the glorious truth is that "the family of heaven and the family of earth are one." *—The Desire of Ages*, p. 835.

#### 7. One God and Father

The great and almighty God, the Ruler of the universe, is also our loving heavenly Father! Our Creator and Redeemer died for the human race, that men might be made one with Him and with each other. "As members of the human family we are individual parts of one mighty whole. No soul can be made independent of the rest. There is to be no party strife in the family of God; for the well-being of each is the happiness of the whole. No partition walls are to be built up between man and man. Christ as the great center must unite all in one." *—Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 479.

Speaking with fervent, earnest eloquence to the scholars and sages of Athens gathered on Mars' Hill (Acts 17), the apostle Paul poured out the burden of his soul. He drew the attention of his hearers to the attributes of the true God—His creative power and the existence of His overruling providence. "In that age of caste, when the rights of men were often unrecognized, Paul set forth the great truth of human brotherhood, declaring that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.' In the sight of God all are on an equality, and to the Creator every human being owes supreme allegiance. Then the apostle showed how, through all God's dealings with man, His purpose of grace and mercy runs like a thread of gold." *—The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 238.

The pen of inspiration further elucidates this concept of one great family with Christ as the great center: "There is no person, no nation, that is perfect in every habit and thought. One must learn of another. Therefore God wants the different nationalities to mingle together, to be one in judgment, one in purpose. Then the union that there is in Christ will be exemplified....

"Look to Jesus, brethren; copy His manners and spirit, and you will have no trouble in reaching these different classes. We have not six patterns to follow, nor five; we have only one, and that is Christ Jesus. If the Italian brethren, the French brethren, and the German brethren try to be like Him, they will plant their feet upon the same

foundation of truth; the same spirit that dwells in one will dwell in the other—Christ in them, the hope of glory. I warn you, brethren and sisters, not to build up a wall of partition between different nationalities. On the contrary, seek to break it down wherever it exists. We should endeavor to bring all into the harmony that there is in Jesus, laboring for the one object, the salvation of our fellow men.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 180, 181.

The infinite God is a Father, whose children we are, for “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” Acts 17:28. Let our love for one another testify to the world that we are His disciples!

Some years ago at the Special Olympics in Seattle, Washington, U.S.A., nine handicapped runners lined up at

the starting line for the 100-meter run. At the sound of the gun, all the runners eagerly started out except for one boy who stumbled. He tumbled over a couple of times and began to cry. The other eight runners heard the boy cry and slowly turned around and paused. One girl with Down’s syndrome bent down and kissed the boy and said that would make it better. Then a couple of other athletes linked arms with the fallen boy and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood and the cheering went on for several minutes.

That race paints a picture of what God’s family is like. We are all wounded and broken. We are all challenged in one way or another. But God, in His infinite mercy and grace, makes us part of His family through faith in Christ. And it’s with

our spiritual family that we journey through life, helping each other along the way.

God gave everything He could to fallen humanity; His Son was a living proof of His love when He walked on this earth and gave His life for us sinners. Thus God’s love was not just written about in the Holy Scriptures but was also carried out in action. “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” 2 Corinthians 9:15. This gift was the only begotten Son of the Father.

Let us worship and be united to our heavenly Father, who gave His only begotten Son to save us. With help from above, let us also supremely love and obey Him who died for us. He is waiting to accept us and to unite us to His earthly and heavenly family. Amen.

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Reading 7 – Sabbath, December 10, 2011

## *Family and Church Unity— The Gift of the Spirit*

By Idel Suárez, Jr., U.S.A.

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“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.” “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” John 11:1, 5.

### *Different types of families*

During my postgraduate university studies, I took a course on the family. The concept of the family was hotly debated. Research showed that those who were raised in nuclear families—with their biological fathers and mothers—were more likely to succeed in life, had a lower risk of divorce, and suffered less from mental illness. However, more than one fourth of all those growing up in America today come from single-parent homes where their biological father or mother is missing. Another one third grow up in a stepfamily or blended family with stepparents and stepsiblings. The traditional nuclear family seems to be dying out in the West. Many have grown up with family disunity. How can we help them? How can we help those families and churches which suffer from disunity?

The gospel of John tells of a nontraditional family in Bethany, “the house of figs,” on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. There were no parents in the home. There were three siblings who lived together in love and unity—Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. They were all friends of Jesus. “At the home of Lazarus, Jesus often found rest.... Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, and holy friendship.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 524. Jesus enjoyed visiting these friends, eating at their table, sleeping in their home, and sharing

time with them. They appear to have been single, and each had particular talents which contributed to the family’s success. Each also had trials and temptations to overcome.

By studying and adopting the attributes of these three siblings, our own families can press together, successfully face the challenges and difficulties of life, and welcome Jesus into our homes. Then our families will fulfill the meaning of the two Greek words translated as family in the New Testament. The first word is *oikos*, meaning “household,” or “the home of God.” The second word is *patria*, meaning “nation, lineage, or kindred of God.” As we allow the Spirit of God to move in our souls, fostering these three gifts of the Spirit, unity will blossom in the home, in the church, and in our international denomination.

### *Martha—the gift of service*

It appears that Martha had a talent for cooking. Others would invite Martha to cook for them. Her reputation as a chef spread and she was catering parties and special events. Simon the Pharisee whom Jesus healed from leprosy, asked Martha to cook and cater for his party.

The words of Scripture emphasize that Martha served her guests. A supper was prepared for Jesus, “and Martha served.” John 12:2. An Luke 10:40 says, “But Martha was cumbered about much serving...”

Martha enjoyed serving others. She thought of other’s needs and sought to meet their needs. Like Martha, families need to be organized to serve others. When we are busy

helping others, it unites our home and our church. It fosters togetherness. “Like Martha, we need to be ever abounding in the work of the Lord” (*Daughters of God*, p. 58).

Years ago, a study was made to see what caused people to want to join a group. One of the main attractions was the togetherness of the group. God created human beings to be social, everyone thrives in a supportive group. When the church organizes to serve others, it is a blessing to the community and promotes unity among the members.

Martha served not only in her own home but also in other people’s homes. Likewise we need to take time to visit other families and help them as the Spirit moves us to be a blessing for others.

Families need to come up with plans to work together for Jesus, working as a team to serve their local church, neighborhood, and community. What can they do?

Parents can ask their children to save some of their money to buy Bibles for children in other countries who do not have Bibles. The family can sponsor a missionary in a foreign country or help pay for medical care for a minister’s son or daughter who needs it but cannot afford it. When families sacrifice together, they come especially close to each other in new ways, not just in serving, but in prayer and attitude.

“An American businessman, who was an earnest Christian, in conversation with a fellow worker, remarked that he himself worked for Christ twenty-four hours of the day. ‘In all my business relations,’ he said, ‘I try to represent my Master. As I have opportunity, I try to win others to Him. All day I am working for Christ. And at night, while I sleep, I have a man working for Him in China.’ In explanation, He added: ‘In my youth I determined to go as a missionary to the heathen. But on the death of my father I had to take up his business in order to provide for the family. Now, instead of going myself, I support a missionary. In such a town of such a province of China, worker is stationed. And so, even while I sleep, I am, through my representative, still working for Christ.’

“Are there not Seventh-day Adventists who will do likewise? Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: ‘Go work

for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church. We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 29, 30.

Doing something for others which costs us money, time, and effort gives more blessing to the giver than to the receiver. It puts the face of Christ on those who entertain and extend the ministry of Jesus in favor of the outcast and hurting ones. It gives a testimony to the world that the church is alive and ministering to relieve the suffering and shame on our planet. Think globally, but act locally.

### ***Mary—the gift of missionary zeal***

According to Hebrew law, a woman could not testify in court. Her testimony was not credible. Yet after His resurrection Jesus ignored Hebrew tradition and appeared first to Mary. She was the first to tell the world that Jesus had risen from the grave. She shared her testimony that Jesus was alive with the apostles, with the disciples, and with her family. “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with Him, as they mourned and wept.” Mark 16:9, 10.

She became Mary Magdalene because, according to tradition, she lived at one time in Magdala, a town near the Sea of Galilee. She was known to be an ardent missionary for Jesus. She had been healed from mental illness. She knew what it was to be demon possessed. She hurt for others in pain. She shared the gospel message with those who mourned and wept. Her life had been transformed by Jesus. She had a wonderful hope and wanted others to share in that hope. As she became a partaker of the divine nature, she received the gift of missionary zeal.

“Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome.

“When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was

first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

Oh, may the missionary zeal of Mary inspire us as we face a new year! Mary gave her best. Mary gave her all. The family needs to be a missionary unit. Every member of the household of God must share the faith or lose it. Everyone can reach out and touch others with the message of Jesus, with the three angels’ messages, with the Reformation message. Every member must get involved in sharing the truth.

Sister White writes how she shared the gospel not just by preaching and writing but also by sharing books. “We gave away many of our large and small books to families [attending camp meeting] who were unable to buy them, asking them to read them and to lend them to their neighbors. In this way we set one family to work for neighboring families. They would come together and read the books aloud. As a result, conviction was brought to the hearts of some, and souls were converted.”—(Letter 102, 1908) *The Publishing Ministry*, p. 394.

With modern information technology, we can now share recorded CDs of sermons and even recorded DVDs of lectures which can be downloaded from General Conference website. Some families may even be able to purchase a CD/DVD duplicator and duplicate their favorite sermons and share them with acquaintances, friends, and extended-family members. Young people can post nice Christian songs or sermon videos on their Facebook page.

Like Mary, we need to let the indwelling character of Jesus radiate out to everyone around us, to everyone we meet. We need to share the enthusiasm of the hope we have in Jesus Christ. This missionary zeal will unite the family members to Jesus and to each other.

### ***Lazarus—the gift of friendship***

“These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” John 11:11.

“Jesus considered Lazarus to be His personal friend. He was greatly beloved by the Saviour.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 524. They would converse together. They enjoyed each other’s company. Like the friendship of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament, Jesus’ heart was knit together with that of Lazarus. While Jesus faced scorn and ridicule from His stepbrothers, Lazarus seemed to be the brother whom Jesus longed for. “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Proverbs 18:24.

Lazarus was friendly and hospitable. He gave gifts to his friends. He called on them. He laughed with them. He walked with them. He sent messages to them. He was a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

It is in the home circle and the local church that we learn to be friends. My father told me that friends are chosen, but family is inherited. We rarely choose our parents or children. We are born into families or become united to families because of the desires of our parents. But friends we choose.

We are not to create friendship with the world or the things of the world. We need to be friends with God. We must seek the Jesus who is living in our brothers and sisters.

When ministers visit homes like Jesus visited that of Lazarus, they should take time to share the gospel and converse with the family members on religious topics. They need to be a true friend to their host family. They need to be representatives of Jesus in the home that gives them hospitality.

“I have been shown that our ministers generally are deficient in making themselves useful in the families where they are entertained. Some devote their minds to study because they love this employment. They do not feel that it is a duty which God enjoins upon ministers to make themselves a blessing in the families which they visit, but many give their minds to books and shut themselves away from the family and do not converse with them upon the subjects of truth. The religious interests in the family are scarcely mentioned. This is all wrong. . . . They should feel the deepest interest in the families they visit; they should not feel that they are to be petted and waited upon while they give nothing in return. There is an obligation resting upon Christian families to entertain the ministers of Christ, and there is also a duty resting upon ministers who receive the hospitality of Christian friends to feel under mutual obligation to bear their own burdens as far as possible and not be a tax to their friends.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 308.

### ***The family—the basic unit of the church***

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus loved each other deeply. Individually and together, they spent time with Jesus and loved Him. Their home was a branch Sabbath-keeping church. And today, also, each family is the basic unit of the church. Each home is to function as a branch Sabbath-keeping church where prayer, Bible reading, testimony, and song are enjoyed on a daily basis. Each family member has a strong influence on the local church, the field conference, the union conference, and even the General Conference. It is like casting a stone into the water of a lake, making ever-widening circles which eventually reach the far lakeshore. Hence, the first work of today’s Martha’s, Mary’s, and Lazarus is to be united first and foremost at home—in the family circle.

“The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to their neighbors nigh and afar off. . . . The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home.

“The happiness of families and churches depends upon home influences. Eternal interests depend upon the proper discharge of the duties of this life. The world is not so much in need of great minds as of good men who will be a blessing in their homes.”—*The Adventist Home*, pp. 37, 38.

“After the family then comes the church. The influence of the family is to be

such that it will be a help and a blessing in the church....

“The religion of the home will surely be brought into the church.”—*Child Guidance*, pp. 551, 552.

The influence of that family in Bethany 2,000 years ago continues to echo down to our day as we enter a new year. Like Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, we must learn to know the power of Jesus’ resurrection. He must resurrect us from our spiritual death, indifference, and indolence. “Brethren, the greatest miracle that can be wrought is the conversion of the human heart. We need to be reconverted, losing sight of self and human ideas, and beholding Christ, that we may be transformed into His likeness.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 113.

The apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:10: “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.” First, we know Him. Second, we experience the power of His resurrection—the gospel power to change sinners into saints. Then, the daily afflictions, struggles, trials, and crises help us to fellowship with Jesus in His sufferings. How? You see, Jesus comes to suffer with us in our suffering. We identify with Him in new ways. He does leave us alone but, as with Martha and Mary, makes the trip to our homes with a message of hope and life. He is the resurrection and the life.

### *A crisis event—God’s opportunity*

God allowed a terrible crisis to shake the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Death brought sorrow to the sisters of Bethany. They lost their beloved brother and breadwinner. The home was not the same. They could not understand why Jesus had not come and healed Lazarus.

Perhaps death, separation, disability, depression, or financial loss has struck your home this past year. It has shaken you to the roots. Perhaps, like Martha, you wonder why the Lord did not intervene in time. Yet a crisis is an opportunity for God to bring healing and uplift His name and cause. As Jesus told Martha, God allows crises so we, and others with us, may become fellow partakers of His sufferings and behold His glory if we only believe. “Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” John 11:40.

In Chinese, the word for “crisis” is made up of two symbols. One is the character for danger. The other is the character for opportunity. Hence, every family crisis is an opportunity to test our faith in God. It is an opportunity for God to show us that saving grace and simple faith will carry us through to a new beginning. We become part of God’s great drama of life and salvation for others to witness the great difference between believers and unbelievers who similar challenges and crises.

“With nations, with families, and with individuals, He has often permitted matters to come to a crisis, that His interference might become marked. Then He has made manifest that there is a God in Israel who will maintain His law and vindicate His people.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 178.

One of the greatest miracles Jesus performed during His ministry on earth was raising Lazarus from the dead. This was such a powerful witness that the Sanhedrim wanted to assassinate not just Jesus but Lazarus to negate the undeniable witness to Jesus’ power over death. “But ... the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.” John 12:10, 11.

Oh, may every family crisis be a witness to cause others to believe in Jesus. Oh, may we be able to experience the resurrection power that Lazarus felt. Oh, may Jesus also tell us, “Come forth.” John 11:43.

As we near the end of another year of our pilgrimage on earth, it brings us all closer to the last great crisis that will sweep the planet by surprise. God is preparing us for that event through the big and small difficulties of life that come to us as families and as a church. But during the coming crisis, God will intervene. Jesus will resurrect the dead and dry bones and fill them with His Holy Spirit. The latter rain will bring about a transformation that will turn the world upside down through the preaching of the third angel’s message that will swell to a loud cry. Yet today’s events are the preparation for the solemn events just before us, just around the corner. Are you ready? Is your family spiritually prepared? Is your local church united in spirit to receive the Spirit of God?

### *Unity in planning as well as in pain and service*

During the so-called “vegetarian riots” which exploded in China, a Christian missionary family was attacked. In the aggression three of seven children, along with their father, were mercilessly put to death.

Witnessing such terrible murder and pain, the four surviving children decided to escape; and they succeeded. But after a time they met again and planned what would be their best “revenge.” They searched for a Christian institution to give them spiritual preparation to return to China. They then applied their youth, talents, and lives to serve the very country that had been so ungrateful to the members of their family!

At the same time when those four people were killed, the daughters of a widow who lived in Australia were murdered. When the mother received the news, instead of being prostrated with grief, she formulated a new purpose. “I have no other girls that I can give,” she said, “but I will give myself.” So, at the age of 72, she sold everything she had and went to the place of the massacre. She learned the language of the country, founded a school, and served for twenty years, until she died and was buried next to her daughters.

In both of these cases, we are dealing with survivors of very difficult circumstances, of unjust and cruel actions, who refused to be overcome by grief; they used it and made it useful. Instead of being overwhelmed by the wagon wheel of pain, they climbed aboard the wagon and headed for a glorious destiny.

As members of God’s people, are we called to do less? May He help us to have such

a wonderful spirit and initiative in our families and in the church!

The moral of the story is that the true Christian must offer his and her best upon the altar of God. Our children must be encouraged to serve, to have missionary zeal, and to make friends for Jesus. We need to set the example. It will be contagious and have a profound effect upon those around us.

Are you willing to give your best for the Master? Are you willing to do everything possible for unity and peace? May the unity of the Spirit bless you in your home and in your church. May His Spirit inspire your family to practice service, missionary work, and friendliness at home and in your local congregation. Amen.

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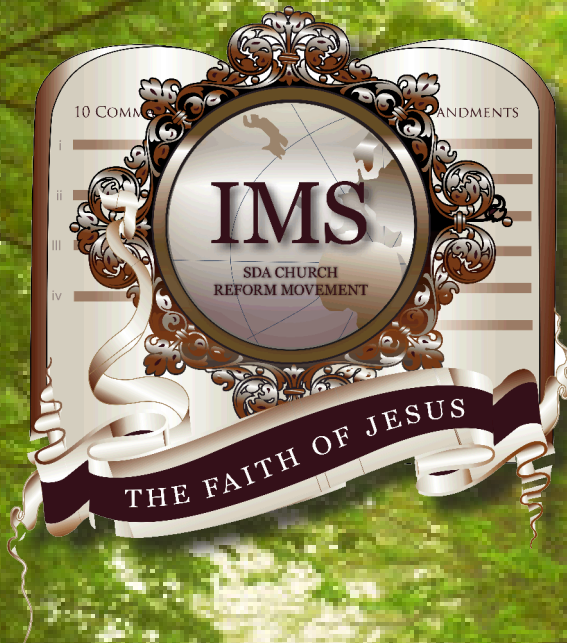
“Unity and love will accomplish wonderful things for the believers. Will not our churches arouse, and give the last warning message to the world?”

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 69, 70

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*“Just as you conduct yourself in your home life, you are registered in the books of heaven. He who would become a saint in heaven must first become a saint in his own family. If fathers and mothers are true Christians in the family, they will be useful members of the church and be able to conduct affairs in the church and in society after the same manner in which they conduct their family concerns. Parents, let not your religion be simply a profession, but let it become a reality.”*

*—The Adventist Home, p. 317.*



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