

Lesson #7 – The Unified Body of Christ – 5-11 August 2023

Christ would have us unified as His body. The memory text tells part of this process, “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12), and the next verse goes to the heart of what unifies us, “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 fulness of Christ” (verse 13). Before the end, is “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” The knowledge of the Son of God is the eschatological culmination of the church! It is by the Sonship of Christ that we are united into the household of God, for God accepts us only through His Son; we are “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Satan knows that it is the Sonship of Christ that unites us and he seeks to destroy our knowledge of the Son of God. This warfare, Satan started in heaven and continues to the end. We do well to recount how the Sonship of Christ is at the centre of the great controversy. First, the fallen angels would obscure the fact that Christ is the Son of God: “Angels were expelled from heaven ... This fact the [fallen] angels would obscure, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God...” {Ellen White, TDG 128.2}. Second, the chief fallen angel tempted Jesus to doubt He was the Son of God: “If thou be the son of God...”; “If thou be the son of God...” (Matthew 4:3, 6). Third, the Jewish church leaders rejected Jesus’ claim that He was indeed the Son of God: Jesus referred to God as His Father, and the Jews took stones to stone Him, saying that He being a mere man call Himself the Son of God and in that sense made Himself equal with God (John 10:29-36) – “The whole nation of the Jews called God their Father, therefore they would not have been so enraged if Christ had represented Himself as standing in the same relation to God. But they accused Him of blasphemy, showing that they understood Him as making this claim in the highest sense” {Ellen White, DA 207.4}. Fourth, the church in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up, rejected that He was the Son of God: they regarded Him merely as the son of Joseph, and after He read from Isaiah and said the prophecy referred to Him, they thrust Him out of the church and would have thrown Him over the cliff headlong had He not escaped (Luke 4:16-30). Fifth, our Seventh-day Adventist theologians say that the Sonship of Christ is a mere metaphor, not real. Note what the Biblical Research Institute – the official body that is responsible for enhancing the understanding of our Seventh-day Adventist church doctrines and beliefs – says. In an article entitled “A Question of Sonship” published in 2015, the Bible Research Institute says, “Christ is the eternal Son of God. ... We are dealing with metaphorical use of the word ‘son.’ Metaphorical significance: The Son is not the natural, literal Son of the Father” (website; re-printed in *Adventist World*, November 2015, p 42). “Notice that He will ‘therefore be called the Son [of] God.’ It is a conferred title, a missional moniker in Luke’s telling, not a description of His intrinsic, pre-incarnate identity. He will be called the Son of God precisely because He was conceived in Mary’s womb by a miracle, as was Isaac, not because He always was the Son of God by nature before coming to our world” (Ty Gibson, *The Sonship of Christ*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1 January 2019, p. 85). What does the Bible say about theologians who reduce the Sonship of Christ to a mere metaphor, denying the relationship between the Father and Son to be real? It says, “He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).

Sunday: The Unity of the Spirit – What is Christian unity? Christian unity is unity not *from* the divine Spirit, nor thus *by* the divine Spirit; but is “the unity of the Spirit” Himself. To be sure, keep in mind Paul understood that there is “one Spirit” (Eph 4:4), also known as “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9), and “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Cor 3:17), for Christ was made a quickening Spirit (1 Cor 15:45) and sent into our hearts (Gal 4:6). Christian unity is not a unity derived by people from the divine Spirit, nor primarily caused among people by the divine Spirit. It is “the unity of the divine Spirit” Himself; it is known only in the Spirit; and is obtained by believers in the receiving, and being possessed of, the Spirit of Christ Himself. Christian unity is far more than union among Christians. It is far more than even the union of all Christians. Christian unity is nothing less, and nothing else, than the divine unity itself, possessing Christians. Christian unity is not a unity of brotherhood even; it is far more than

that; for Jesus prayed “that they all may be one” – not as James and John are or may be one – not as Andrew and Peter are or may be one, BUT – “as thou Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they may be one IN US.” “That they may be one, even as WE are one.” “I in them, and thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in One.” All who “have been made to drink into this one Spirit,” of the “one Lord,” through the “one faith” of the one Christ, and of the “one God and Father of all,” and are possessed of this “one Spirit,” and “live” and “walk” “in the Spirit” – all these are one in Him and with Him in the very “unity of the Spirit,” which is the divine unity itself. Scripture defines Christian Fellowship, thus: “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.... This the is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the Light as he is in the light we have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:3-7). By this Scripture it is plain that Christian fellowship is not primarily fellowship with one another; but fellowship with the Father and with the Son; and then fellowship with one another as the consequence of this fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is only when Christians “walk in the light as He is in the light,” that “we have fellowship one with another.” That Light is Christ. Walking in the Light is walking in Christ. Having fellowship with Him we have it with one another. This Life and Light is “declared,” so that, having Life and walking in the Light, we may have fellowship with Him; and this in order that we may have fellowship with those whose “fellowship is,” truly and primarily, “with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Monday: Together as One in the One – How can Adventists live together as one in the one? All that is required is that they all look only to Christ as the one grand Centre of all, drink into His one Spirit, and freely forget everything else. Then by that alone they would all be one immediately. “In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, the plan of God is so plainly and simply revealed, that all His children may lay hold upon the truth. Here the means which He has appointed to keep unity in His church, that its members may reveal to the world a healthy religious experience, is plainly declared. Those who conform their lives to obedience to the commandments of God, and are united in the faith of the Scriptures; those who are bound together as one in Christ Jesus, their lives hid with Christ in God, will practice the golden rule, doing to others as they would have others do to them. They will bear a living, abiding testimony that the Father loves them even as He loves His Son, and their testimony will have a powerful influence with the unbelieving world” {22LtMs, Ms 67, 1907, par. 17}.

Tuesday: The Exalted Christ, Giver of Gifts – How is Christ the giver of gifts and what exactly did He give? When Christ “ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8). These gifts were the gifts of the Spirit, His own Spirit, for He said, “if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). Peter said, “This Jesus having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this” (Acts 2:32). Paul says, “God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts” (Gal 4:6), he describes gifts: “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.... For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4-11).

Wednesday: Gifts of the Exalted Jesus – For what purpose did Christ give gifts? “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” What is the profit? “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). The gifts of the Spirit must accompany the Spirit. As soon as the early disciples received the Spirit in accordance with the promise, they received the gifts. It follows, therefore, that the absence of the gifts of the Spirit in any marked degree in the church, is evidence of the absence of the Spirit, not entirely, of course, but to the extent that God has promised it.

Thursday: Growing Up Into Christ – What danger threatens the Christlike maturity of the church (Eph 4:14)? While verse 14 tells us the danger, the previous verse tells us how we may avoid it: “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 fulness of Christ” (verse 13).