

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Church Organization and Unity – 15-21 December 2018

Chrst would have us know that true church organization and unity is anchored upon Him as the head of His church, and all laity and pastors are brethren. “But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:26-27).

The divine order of relations is this: “the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3); “the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23); and Christ “is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). This Christ was the “leader and commander” who instructed Moses when the children of Israel left Egypt. It is said of Moses, “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). Christ is still the invisible head of His church. No human is head of a true church; ministers in our Seventh-day Adventist Church are but brethren, not lords over Christ’s heritage, for Christ alone is the “leader and commander” of His church. “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matthew 23:8). In Christ’s prayer to the Father for His disciples, He said, “And the glory that Thou gavest Me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22-23).

The union of the Father and the Son is union of spirit. We cannot comprehend this union, but we may know that it is not a forced union, but that it results from their very nature. They have *one life*. Their thoughts and purposes are the same, not because they come together and compare notes and agree to be alike, but because one life is in them both. So the union of believers is to be a vital union, or it is not any union at all. It is not accomplished by strife and debate and decisions of majorities, but by yielding the mind to Christ and hearing His voice. They are to be united by the mind and Spirit of Christ. The life of the Father and the Son in each member of the church will produce the most perfect union in the whole body.

For the human body is the most perfect example of unity, and it is the example that the Bible gives us. Christ is the Head of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). “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 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. For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). In the human body there are many members, and each member has a different office from the rest; there is not uniformity of action among the members, but there is the most perfect unity. All work together in perfect harmony for one object. So it is in the body of Christ. “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

This gives no ground for the idea that there may be divisions in the church of Christ, one division believing one thing, another division believing and practicing another thing. “God has tempered the body together, that there should be no schism in the body” (1 Corinthians 12:24-25). “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Paul’s exhortation is, “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). But let it be borne in mind that this union is not artificial, but natural; not the human nature, however, but the divine nature. The unity of belief in the church is not forced by the church coming together and the majority defining the creed to be believed. The church cannot define doctrine. The church of Christ is made up of all who obey His commands not a body to issue commands. The Head directs, the body obeys. God speaks; each one must listen to His voice, for faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and no one can give faith to another. “It is the gift of God.”

“To whom shall we go?” (John 6:69), asked Peter in the presence of the other disciples, concerning the source of that wisdom which leads to salvation. It is asked by many today who would be made wise unto salvation; but not always is it answered as it was by Peter.

Peter’s question and answer were addressed to Christ. He said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that Thou art that

Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69). But many now answer the same question by turning to "the church." This was not Peter's answer. He was himself an apostle, and could speak with as much wisdom and authority as any one of the followers of Christ; but both he and the other apostles with him confessed their own spiritual insufficiency in the question, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" Whoever might have come to the apostles for the words of eternal life would not have found them, except as the apostle spoke the words of Christ. And every individual who is a component part of "the church" today is just as dependent upon Christ for the words of eternal life as was Peter. And the Saviour is just as accessible to every individual who desires to hear the words of life as He was to Peter.

Peter never invited the attention of those he addressed to himself, or to "the church." "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:2-5). There is laid in Zion a "chief corner stone," which is the Lord Jesus Christ. To that Stone every seeker for salvation must come; to that alone are they invited by the Lord to come. They must fall on the Rock and be broken. The church is but the light which God has placed in the world to show men the way to Christ, the living Stone.

The church existed long before the time of Peter; it is the body of Christ, and Christ has been the spiritual Head of His followers ever since the time of Adam. The martyr Stephen said that the great company who went with Moses out of Egypt constituted "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). So there was the church in the time of Peter and the other apostles, for the same spiritual organisation had been retained from the time of Moses, with its system of sacrifices and beautiful temple, which stood in the place of the tabernacle which Moses built. The "church in the wilderness" was the true church of Christ; for we are told "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Frequently they rebelled against the Lord; but the Lord, though they often rejected Him, did not reject them; so that even as late as the time of Peter Jesus said of them, "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do" (Matthew 23:2-3). But if Peter had sought to "the church" for spiritual light and wisdom, he would not have been a follower of Christ; for "the church" rejected Him and put Him to death. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

If Martin Luther and his fellow-workers had made "the church" the spiritual guide, the world would never have heard from them the preaching of the Gospel in the Reformation. Yet they found the Word of the Lord – the Holy Scriptures – and gave that Word to the people, having first received it into their own hearts. They drank from the fountain of life, and then led others to the same fountain. They all as did ancient Israel, "drank of that spiritual Rock that went with them," which was Christ. And Christ Himself is the fountain of life today.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4). Who can bring infallibility out of fallibility? When any number of fallible beings take action together, the result is fallibility still. They can produce only fallible decisions and speak only fallible words. This is an infallible Word which they can hold forth, and that is the word of Christ, which He said should not pass away (Philippians 2:16; Mark 13:31). The Father gives willingly to all that ask Him (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). Thus God has given us His Spirit, whose office is to guide men into all truth and reveal to them the things of God. All this is free to rich and poor, and to learned and unlearned, alike. And therefore no man can have any occasion or excuse for being led by any other word or guide. If he lacks wisdom he has only to "ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

The principle of looking to "the church" for spiritual guidance is of the Papacy, and is consistent with papal assumptions and claims, – implying that God is far off from mankind, so that He needs a viceregent here to carry on His work, who must needs demonstrate his infallibility, which is necessary to his acting in God's stead, by a vote of several hundred men, all of whom were fallible. But God is not far off from every one of us, Christ is with His church even unto the end of the world, and His sheep hear His own voice, and know not the voice of a stranger. There is nothing that has any rightful place between the soul and Him.