

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***Oneness in Christ***  
**Lesson 2: Causes of Disunity**

How people in a church can truly believe the same thing (be in unity) is important, because Jesus said that the only way the world can be brought to believe in Him is when His followers “all may be one, ... that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). Something He calls “Your truth” is the only thing that will unite them (vs. 17). Paul calls it “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14). The success or failure of Christ’s mission for the world therefore depends on that “truth” bringing His people who profess to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” into one (Rev. 14:12).

Take the problem of Genesis 1. Christ and His apostles accepted that “the truth of the gospel” required sincere, honest hearts to believe that God created the earth in six literal days. People who insist they are equally sincere understand the idea of six literal days to be ancient mythology; science makes such belief naive, they say.

In a church that has for more than 150 years stood for creation in six days, a literal reading of Genesis 1, 2, etc., there are now powerful voices advocating evolution. There are divisions about women’s ordination, about music in church worship services, and on. And for many, “the blessed hope” of the soon second coming of Christ is receding into the background, and a materialistic earthly lifestyle is taking its place.

Then there’s the problem of Jesus Himself. When He became incarnate, did He “take” the sinless nature of the unfallen Adam, thus breaking the genetic line of His descent from the real Adam? Or did He accept the working of the great law of heredity and enter the stream of humanity by taking our fallen, sinful nature yet living a sinless life? Here again is disunity; the assumption is that unity is impossible. Or is it?

Why does disunion seem to flourish so? And how can the church enlighten the earth with glory if it is in a divided state? And what can bring the true unity Christ prayed for?

There is a solution. If God is real and if His Bible is true, it follows that God has a solution for the problem of disunity. God will bring His people into unity. That which to doubters today seems impossible, the Holy Spirit will accomplish. He brought the disunited eleven apostles into unity before the Day of Pentecost. They were “with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). That was “the former rain,” and the “latter rain” is promised to be even greater. God cannot use force to accomplish it. For Him to burn down the churches or strike them with lightning, wouldn’t solve the root problem.

Ephesians tells us the solution: for those “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,” is the message of *agape* (4:14, 15). Such a message proclaims

what Christ accomplished, the pure biblical truth of justification by faith. Christ has promised solemnly that if He is lifted up on His cross, that is, if His *agape* is clearly proclaimed, He “will draw all peoples to [Himself],” and that of course is perfect unity (John 12:32). Let the leadership of a church that is being fragmented receive that “most precious message” of Christ’s righteousness; the miracle of unity is as certain as day follows night.

Is it possible for Seventh-day Adventist theologians to originate today among themselves a message that again would be the “beginning” or continuation of the latter rain and the loud cry? Must we re-study and accept the 1888 message before we can recover the latter rain which has been so long delayed?

If the Lord was capable of sending “a most precious message” to His people through the 1888 “messengers,” Elders E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones, He is surely capable of sending such a message through any chosen instrument He may select today. But problems arise immediately!

Why hasn’t He already done so? Why the long delay of decade after decade?

Again, it is no secret that many of our theologians and ministers claim to be preaching “righteousness by faith” accurately and clearly. Why does it seem that rarely two of them can agree? Jones and Waggoner maintained a remarkable harmony in their message, even when separated from each other by thousands of miles, for about a decade or more.

Is it reasonable that the Lord would grant additional light to His people while they continue to neglect or even despise light that He has already given them? We don’t know for sure; but one thing *is* sure, it would be absolutely contrary to His manner of working in past ages. For example, we could as well argue that He should send the Jews a new “Messiah” while they continue to reject the One He already sent them two thousand years ago. Most of us would agree that the Jews at the Wailing Wall praying for the Messiah to come would do well to study the New Testament documents that tell how the Lord already sent Him to them!

If the message of justification by faith as taught by the 16th century Reformers is “the third angel’s message in verity,” why didn’t the Lord in 1888 refer our people to *them* instead of sending the message He did send by Jones and Waggoner?

One thing is crystal clear: The Lord Jesus Christ calls upon the “angel of the church of the Laodiceans” to “repent.” What can such “repentance” mean for the remnant church? “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, *and His teaching in our past history.*” [1]

What can bring unity to the remnant church? Some say it is impossible; the best we can hope for is a “shaking,” and disunity until probation closes.

It seems impossible that the church could ever be united on teachings of “righteousness by faith” as advanced by Sunday-keeping Reformers and theologians. Not only do we find almost hopeless disagreement among themselves, but we also find serious cautions expressed by Ellen G. White concerning undue confidence in the Reformers’ positions. While it is true that “the great doctrine of justification by faith” was “clearly taught by Luther,” it is obvious that the Lord’s servant means by that statement that he taught it “clearly” for his day and under his circumstances. Elsewhere she makes clear that Luther did not preach “the everlasting gospel” in the setting of “the last days.” “This message [the first angel’s] is a part of the gospel which could be proclaimed only in the last days, for only then would it be true that the hour of judgment *had come*.” [2]

But what the 16th century Reformers never did, Jones and Waggoner went on to do. They built upon this foundation a grand edifice of biblical truth that is unique and distinctly Seventh-day Adventist as a completion of the Reformation begun long ago. They developed a message of righteousness by faith parallel to and consistent with the unique Adventist truth of the cleansing of the sanctuary.

“The message of Christ’s righteousness” that is to lighten the earth with glory is ministered from the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ our High Priest is completing His work of reconciliation on this antitypical Day of Atonement. This required a clearer view of Christ’s sacrifice on His cross, and of His righteousness manifested in human flesh, clearer than had ever been seen before.

In summation, any message of righteousness by faith which succeeds in uniting the world church must be: (a) biblical; (b) in harmony with the writings of Ellen G. White; and (c) in harmony with Seventh-day Adventist Church history.

Therefore, it seems that the only reasonable basis for unity is indeed the 1888 message itself. It is (a) biblical, for Jones and Waggoner relied entirely in Scripture; (b) in complete harmony with Ellen White’s writings, and enjoys her unequivocal support and endorsement in forcefulness and emphasis completely unprecedented in her long prophetic career; and (c) Seventh-day Adventist history points unmistakably in that direction as the path to repentance in fulfillment of our Lord’s command.

“Let us thank the Lord that He is dealing with us still, to save us from our errors, to save us from our dangers, to keep us back from wrong courses, and to pour upon us the latter rain, that we may be translated. That is what the [1888] message means—translation—to you and me. ... Let us receive it with all the heart, and thank God for it.” [3]

Remember: Truth never causes disunity; only error does.

—*From the Writings of Robert J. Wieland*

**Endnotes:**

[1] *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, emphasis added.

[2] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 253, 356.

[3] A. T. Jones, *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 1893; "The Third Angel's Message No. 9"; p. 185.

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

[https://youtu.be/UCz87\\_rNF6k](https://youtu.be/UCz87_rNF6k)

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to [sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org](mailto:sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org)