

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Oneness in Christ
Lesson 4: The Key to Unity

Chaos. It's becoming the defining word for the world we live in. The Middle East has been at war for more than twenty years, with Syria nearly annihilating their own civilian population. Politics, whether in the United States or Europe has become a divisive, almost uncivil enterprise. Some nations are on the brink of financial chaos. Society is divided on many levels: women's liberation movement against any form of male leadership; LGBTQ+ against the Christians; Democrats against the Republicans in a caustic battle for power; a rising liberal youth segment against anyone older than 30. Central Africa has seen civil war at unprecedented levels, with famine and plagues exacerbating the situation for the populace.

Even the natural world seems stirred to chaotic levels. The Pacific has seen more cyclones with wind speeds greater than 155 miles per hour this year than any other on record. The Atlantic ocean has produced two catastrophic storms in a matter of weeks. Earthquakes, volcanoes erupting, fires destroying vast swathes of western United States forests and some towns. It seems that the very earth is revolting.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:7, 8).

Our study this quarter is unity. How can unity be accomplished in the face of such chaos? Unity in today's world seems to be akin to the proverbial "black swan." Juvenal, the Roman poet of the first century, advanced the philosophical theory that applied to events that were so rare as to be considered nearly impossible. He called such events a "black swan." His phrase caught on, and the truism held for nearly 1700 years—no one had ever seen a black swan until a Dutch explorer discovered one in western Australia in 1697. We have been proclaiming the "soon coming" of Jesus for 175 years, but for many people, it seems like that proverbial black swan, something the world will never see, or least, something that we will never see in our lifetime.

The last message to be given to the world engulfed in chaos, is the message of God's unfathomable love. That Love, "so loved the world" that it was willing to sacrifice itself so that others might live. "From the foundation of the world" this Love has unstintingly laid itself down for us. God "ordained" or "predestined" to be saved, every human being who would ever be born on this planet. "[God] hath chosen us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Peter wrote that we have been [past tense] "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, Who verily was foreordained from the foundation of world" (1 Peter 1:19, 20). Paul

wrote in his first letter to Timothy, that Christ is “the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe” (1 Tim. 4:10).

As soon as sin entered this world, Christ stepped between the living and dead, giving His own life, that the human race would continue through Adam. Adam and Eve did not die that afternoon in the Garden (see Gen. 2:17) because the Substitute was found—Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). “As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.” [1]

Now, imagine what would have happened if no substitute had stepped forward that afternoon. God had stated emphatically (Hebrew doubling, “die, you shall die”) that the day Adam sinned was the day he would die. If Adam had reaped the just punishment for his rebellion, then the human race would have ceased to exist that very afternoon. We are only still here six millennia later because of the infinite love of our God.

This truth is the essential meaning of that complicated sounding phrase, “legal justification.” Standing before the broken law, Christ stepped into Adam’s “shoes” and assumed complete responsibility for the crime Adam committed, and accepted the just punishment to be inflicted upon Himself. To do this, Christ had to also, one day, assume the nature of fallen Adam.

Corporately, as the “Last Adam,” Christ took upon His sinless nature the nature that needed redeeming, and as corporate mankind, He lived a perfect life, and then took that perfect life and offered it on the cross of Calvary. “Because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead” (2 Cor. 5:14). And as Christ is the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” His “one just act” (see Rom. 5:15-19) emancipated the entire human race. [2] Thus, the Godhead canceled the death penalty for every human being—“especially those who believe.” For the many who will not believe, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” (Heb. 10:26, 27).

What a message we have been given to share with the dying world—a world in chaos, that is looking for love in all the wrong places! God loves you with an intimate, personal, undying love that will not let you go, unless you resist and chose to run away. Such good news, when shared with people who are searching for relief from the troubles of this world, will bring unity “in Christ” when they learn to appreciate what has already been done to save them eternally from sin. They don’t have to “get better” first, before God will love them. They are already “beloved” in Christ who gave His life for them, and “adopted” them into His family (Eph. 1:3-5).

The “goal” of unity is not some future reward in heaven that we must diligently work for. *The goal is Christ!* Learning from Him how to consistently behave like a child of the King of the universe, as we grow daily into the likeness of His character, “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” (Eph. 4:13). [The additional comma after the word “come,” is intentional. It places the emphasis of Paul’s words on the goal of Christ—the Perfect Man—rather than on our “faith.” All punctuation in the Bible is translator supplied.]

The key to unity, is not more agreement between individuals or in church councils. True unity will happen when individuals rally behind the great truths of the 1888 message that, when accepted in its fullness, will allow heaven to open its doors and pour out the long-awaited Latter Rain upon a penitent and humbled people. Not everyone wants to be united, and it’s a pipe dream to think all will be united. Disunity arises from a sinful, selfish heart that most of the world will cling to right up to the very end.

This means that, just as in the past, there will continue to be opposition to God’s final message to the dying world—the message of Christ and His righteousness. But when God finally has a people—that mysterious 144,000—who are willing to give up on self and “follow the Lamb wherever He goes,” then the Latter Rain will fall upon that “especially-who-believe” group of people.

Everyone will not be the recipients of this blessing from heaven. “Only those who are living up to the light they have will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.” [3]

—Ann Walper

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 12, 1901.

[2] See Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 90.

[3] Ellen. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 507.

Notes:

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

<https://youtu.be/t-kWFTADQFk>

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