

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Images of Unity
Lesson 6: Images of Unity

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, *even* Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forever” (Psalm 133:1-3).

The Bible is full of metaphors but none is more important for the church than the 1888 message’s concept that we are all “in” Christ. All other metaphors are developed out of that basic concept. To understand this, there are some hints in David’s psalm quoted above. He connects unity to the “oil” as the vehicle which connects “brothers.” How do we come to understand that we are all brothers and how does that unify us? The answer is in the sacrifice of the cross.

Christ laid aside His divinity (“emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of men,” Phil. 2:7). Notice, He did not abandon his divinity, He laid it aside. In other words, He didn’t use it to help Him during His earthly ministry. Many find this difficult to believe because He performed miracles and never sinned. Christ came to demonstrate to the world and watching universe that the Holy Spirit can indwell “sinful flesh” so completely, that “our life will be a life of continual obedience” as if “carrying out our own impulses.” [1]

Why did Christ have to lay aside His divinity? The Bible teaches that it is unethical for someone to be punished for another’s wrong. Ezekiel 18:20 makes it very clear: “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.” Since the first Adam brought the entire human race into sin, the only solution was the eternal (second) death; no human sacrifice could pay this penalty and be resurrected. That required the death of Someone with the power to resurrect, but Divinity cannot die.

To resolve this dilemma, Hebrews 10:5 says, “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering Thou hast not desired, but a body Thou hast prepared for Me’ In order for God to save us through Christ He had to qualify Christ to be our Savior. God did this by combining the divine life of His Son with the human Adamic life and uniting the two in the womb of Mary. Corporately, the entire race, out of all the created beings in the universe, was united with Divinity. We did not deserve this, but our magnificent and gracious God made this supreme sacrifice.

“None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father’s love to lost humanity.” [2]

“By His life and His death, Christ has achieved even more than recovery from the ruin wrought through sin. It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen. In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us.” [3]

The angel told Mary that Jesus’ conception would be accomplished by the Holy Spirit which “will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Mary’s pregnancy was not initiated by an ordinary man, but by the Holy Spirit. Thus, humanity and divinity were combined her womb.

“If He were not of the same flesh as are those whom He came to redeem, then there is no sort of use of His being made flesh at all. More than this: Since the only flesh that there is in this wide world which He came to redeem, is just the poor, sinful, lost, human flesh that all mankind have; if this is not the flesh that He was made, then He never really came to the world which needs to be redeemed. [4]

When Jesus told Nicodemus we must be born again, He meant born of the Spirit, just as the Spirit caused His conception in the womb of Mary. David must have recognized something of this mechanism when he could think of nothing to compare his joy to except the anointing oil which inaugurated Aaron’s high priestly imagery. That oil was given so lavishly that it fell onto his beard and cloths, all the way to the hem of his garment. Again, the imagery was echoed when Mary Magdalene found there was so much of her gift of oil that she had to use her hair to catch the excess.

The imagery is continued at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the earth to facilitate Christ’s high priestly ministry, which He began at His ascension. The imagery parallels the lavish oil of Aaron, which resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that the believers at Pentecost were anointed with the oil which anointed Jesus in heaven.

The result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, if accepted in the heart of the believer results in the washing of regeneration. David saw this when his mind went to the “dew of Hermon” which washed Zion.

Imagery and metaphor are wonderful vehicles to help us understand the plan of salvation. David’s Psalm 133 describes that only the oil of the Holy Spirit and the washing of regeneration can accomplish unity among believers. By accepting our position in Christ, we realize we stand equally with all believers. Whatever degree of unity is necessary to protect the church will flow naturally from that.

—Arlene Hill

Footnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 668.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 14.

[3] *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

[4] A. T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, p. 41; Glad Tidings ed. (2003).

Notes:

Bible verses are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

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

<https://youtu.be/l4z5gBLfAi8>

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