

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Fourth Quarter 2018: *Oneness in Christ*

Lesson 4 The Key to Unity

Read for this week's study

Ephesians 1:3–14; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:1–6, 11; Matthew 20:25–28; Ephesians 5:15–6:9.

Memory Text

“Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:9, 10, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Blessings in Christ
- III. Breaking Down the Wall
- IV. Unity in One Body
- V. Church Leaders and Unity
- VI. Human Relationships in Christ
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Jon Paulien

1. What is the central issue in the universe? What implications does Ephesians 1:9-10 have for your answer? (Sabbath Afternoon)
2. Read Ephesians 1:3-14. What does the oft-repeated phrase “in Christ” actually mean? According to this passage (a single sentence in the original language), what do we receive in Christ? Why is this comprehensive, cosmic passage never mentioned in Great Controversy studies? What does the text mean when it says that God “chose” or “predestined” us before the foundation of the world? (Sunday’s lesson)
3. Read Ephesians 2:11-22. How does our unity in Christ affect our differences? What was broken down by Jesus’ death on the cross? In what ways can you see your own religious community in the reality of what Paul has written here? (Monday’s lesson)

4. Read Ephesians 4:1-3. In what way are Christians to walk worthy of their calling in Christ? Why is unity so hard to come by? Read Ephesians 4:4-6. What is the crucial, central theme in these three verses? (Tuesday's lesson)
5. Read Ephesians 4:11-12. What gifts of leadership does God give to the church? What is God's purpose for these gifts? How do the gifts relate to each other? What spiritual gifts do you have personally and how can they be used for the unity of your local church? (Wednesday's lesson)
6. Read Ephesians 5:15-21. What is Paul saying in verse 21? What is the relationship between submission and unity? Read Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9. What impact on human relationships does the concept of mutual submission have in the home and the workplace of the believer in Christ? What kinds of actions exhibit submission? (Thursday's lesson)
7. Reflect on the following statement: "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." *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, page 1117. What in Ephesians 4 do you think she was referring to? (Friday's lesson)
8. If humility and submission are central to the unity of the church, how can these qualities be learned? How can we have unity when we don't always agree on everything? (Friday's lesson)

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

"The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth. But the heavenly universe was amazed at what God chose to do." And what follows is John 3:16.

Instead, he sent his Son to bring us the truth, and particularly at the cross, he answered the great questions about God. One of the things he answered was something he answered on the cross that was not answered in Gethsemane. In Gethsemane, yes, death is the result of sin, but not at the hands of a vengeful God. God did not lay a hand on his Son. But on the cross, people did lay hands on him—people who pictured God as powerful and authoritarian and exacting and severe. And they were Sabbath-keepers, tithe payers, health reformers, Bible believers. Why? Because God had said it and they believed it, and that was all there was to it; and they saw nothing wrong with the use of force.

When disunity came into Judaism and Christians began, Paul went out to restore unity in Judaism. And how did he do it, in Acts 26? He arrested these Christians. He punished them. He put them in prison, and he consented to their death. When Stephen said words before the Sanhedrin that seemed to be a threat to unity, how did those Sabbath-keeping saints seek to

keep unity? They stoned him to death. They saw nothing wrong with that use of force. To them, it was justice.

In the name of God, Paul went out to keep unity in the church. That's been very popular through the years. Hundreds of thousands have been tortured to death at the stake to keep unity in the Christian church. Has it worked? You cannot force trust and love. It just can't be done. It's the very antithesis of freedom. Jesus cleared that up, and the angels realized that is the truth. And that's the greatest protection against hostility and disunity and apostasy and defection in the hereafter. There is not one streak of arbitrariness in our God. He is not exacting, vengeful, and severe. He would rather give his life than give up freedom. Remember, Paul says that even if an angel should disagree with me on this, he's wrong; if even an angel from heaven should come, he's wrong. God says, "That's right. I absolutely will never budge on this. I will run my universe in this manner. Therefore I can only save people who can be entrusted with this kind of freedom—people who love, trust and admire this kind of God." That's "the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God."

So I believe that God's people, wherever they are on this planet, in whatever church, or no church, or wherever they are in the universe, God's church, his true people, are those individuals who, in the highest sense of freedom have decided that they love, trust, and admire that kind of God. And then there is a unity among them, no matter what happens. And that unity will last forever, because it wasn't contrived. It wasn't forced. Are you willing to let God run his universe this way? {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God* in all 66 – Ephesians and Colossians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/67MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/68MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

You see, when he tried to be so gracious and winsome, he wasn't having to straighten them out on their diet. They all ate kosher. Or on their tithe paying. They all paid tithe. Or on their health reform. They strained gnats out of their goat's milk. Or on which day was the Sabbath. Or that they should believe the Bible, the Ten Commandments, creation—you name it. They believed the whole lot. And yet they had no respect for his form of government.

If he had thundered a little more, if he had said, "Yes, take that woman in adultery out and stone her," they would have said, "Now you're talking. That's good leadership." And it wasn't. But the angels had to learn that, too. The question is, in all our concern to do the right and proper thing, are we really people who have unreserved respect for this kind of government? Or could we even be trusted in this kind of government?

That's why I like to make the statement that I believe that God is an infinitely powerful but equally gracious person, who values nothing higher than the freedom and the dignity and the

individuality of his intelligent creatures; that their love, their faith, their worship, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Ephesians and Colossians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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Further Study with Ellen White

The enemy can never take out of the hand of Christ the one who is simply trusting in His promises. If the soul is trusting and working obediently, the mind is susceptible to divine impressions, and the light of God shines in, enlightening the understanding. What privileges we have in Christ Jesus! {SD 351.4}

The most powerful evidence a man can give that he has been born again and is a new man in Christ Jesus, is the manifestation of love for his brethren, the doing of Christlike deeds. This is the most wonderful witness that can be borne in favor of Christianity, and will win souls to the truth. . . . {SD 293.4}

Those who accept Christ as their personal Saviour are not left as orphans, to bear the trials of life alone. He receives them as members of the heavenly family; He bids them call His Father their Father. They are His “little ones,” dear to the heart of God, bound to Him by the most tender and abiding ties. He has toward them an exceeding tenderness, as far surpassing what our father or mother has felt toward us in our helplessness as the divine is above the human. {DA 327.2}

All who choose Christ’s kingdom of love and righteousness and peace, making its interest paramount to all other, are linked to the world above, and every blessing needed for this life is theirs. {DA 313.3}

God regards us as His children. He has redeemed us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the heavenly King. He invites us to trust in Him with a trust deeper and stronger than that of a child in his earthly father. Parents love their children, but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper, than human love can possibly be. It is immeasurable. Then if earthly parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more shall our Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? {COL 142.1}

All who consecrate soul, body, and spirit to God will be constantly receiving a new endowment of physical and mental power. The inexhaustible supplies of heaven are at their command. Christ gives them the breath of His own spirit, the life of His own life. The Holy Spirit puts forth its highest energies to work in heart and mind. The grace of God enlarges and multiplies their

faculties, and every perfection of the divine nature comes to their assistance in the work of saving souls. Through co-operation with Christ they are complete in Him, and in their human weakness they are enabled to do the deeds of Omnipotence. {DA 827.3}

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This command is a promise. The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning. {DA 311.2}

Wherever there is union with Christ there is love. Whatever other fruits we may bear, if love be missing, they profit nothing. Love to God and our neighbor is the very essence of our religion. No one can love Christ and not love His children. When we are united to Christ, we have the mind of Christ. Purity and love shine forth in the character, meekness and truth control the life. The very expression of the countenance is changed. Christ abiding in the soul exerts a transforming power, and the outward aspect bears witness to the peace and joy that reign within. We drink in the love of Christ, as the branch draws nourishment from the vine. If we are grafted in Christ, if fiber by fiber we have been united with the Living Vine, we shall give evidence of the fact by bearing rich clusters of living fruit. If we are connected with the Light, we shall be channels of light, and in our words and works we shall reflect light to the world. Those who are truly Christians are bound with the chain of love which links earth to heaven, which binds finite man to the infinite God. The light that shines in the face of Jesus Christ shines in the hearts of His followers, to the glory of God. {1SM 337.2}

He who places himself unreservedly under the guidance of the Spirit of God, will find that his mind expands and develops. He obtains an education in the service of God which is not one-sided and deficient, developing a one-sided character, but one which results in symmetry and completeness. {1SM 338.2}

Sanctification means habitual communion with God. There is nothing so great and powerful as God's love for those who are His children. {HP 129.5}

To be sanctified is to become a partaker of the divine nature, catching the spirit and mind of Jesus, ever learning in the school of Christ. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord." It is impossible for any of us by our own power or our own efforts to work this change in ourselves. It is the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, which Jesus said He would send into the world, that changes our character into the image of Christ; and when this is accomplished, we reflect, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. That is, the character of the one who thus beholds Christ is so like His, that one looking at him sees Christ's own character shining out as from a

mirror. Imperceptibly to ourselves, we are changed day by day from our ways and will into the ways and will of Christ, into the loveliness of His character. Thus we grow up into Christ, and unconsciously reflect His image. {RC 20.3}

God's ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. The living God has given in His holy law a transcript of His character. The greatest Teacher the world has ever known is Jesus Christ; and what is the standard He has given for all who believe in Him? "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matthew 5:48. As God is perfect in His high sphere of action, so man may be perfect in his human sphere. {CT 365.2}

The work of transformation from unholiness to holiness is a continuous one. Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to co-operate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication. Our Saviour is always ready to hear and answer the prayer of the contrite heart, and grace and peace are multiplied to His faithful ones. Gladly He grants them the blessings they need in their struggle against the evils that beset them. {AA 532.2}

True sanctification unites believers to Christ and to one another in bonds of tender sympathy. This union causes to flow continually into the heart rich currents of Christlike love, which flows forth again in love for one another. {SD 102.2}

He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul. In whatever company He found Himself He presented a lesson appropriate to the time and the circumstances. Every neglect or insult shown by men to their fellow men only made Him more conscious of their need of His divine-human sympathy. He sought to inspire with hope the roughest and most unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them manifest as the children of God. {MH 25.5}

There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife. {MB 27.3}

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the

hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. {DA 173.1}

It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. Its mystery exceeds human knowledge; yet he who passes from death to life realizes that it is a divine reality. The beginning of redemption we may know here through a personal experience. Its results reach through the eternal ages. {DA 173.2}

In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and ennoble the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around. {SC 59.3}