

## Revival and Reformation Lesson 7 3Q 2013

### Unity: The Bond of Revival

Thoughts about the title?

What does unity mean to you?

Any thoughts on what humanity, human relationships, would have been like had Adam and Eve not sinned?

What would you suggest interferes with unity?

Fear – when Adam and Eve sinned they ran and hid because they were afraid – when God came looking for them in the garden, what was the state of Adam and Eve’s “unity”? Did Adam stand by Eve? Or did Adam try to separate himself from her? “It wasn’t me, it was the woman...” Why?

Imagine what Eve felt? “Thank you for your honesty husband” Doubtful – do you think she felt betrayed, hurt, saddened?

What caused the disunity?

Lies believed broke the circle of love and trust – broken love and trust result in fear and selfishness – this breaks unity.

Lies, fear and selfishness.

How do lies, fear and selfishness undermine unity today?

Why is there so much disunity within Christianity? Is it because truth and love predominate? Is it because the church is infected with lies, fear and selfishness?

What is God’s solution to bring unity?

- Truth and Love
- The Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Truth and Love
- Jesus who embodied Truth and Love
- God who is the source of Truth and Love
- The Bible which teaches Truth and Love

Truth destroys lies, wins to trust, in trust the heart is opened and God pours His love into our hearts (Rom 5:5) and we stop living to protect self but to love God and others.

If God's solution is Truth and Love, taught by the Bible, brought by Christ, administered by the Spirit, then how does Satan counter God's remedy in the church?

By lies – what kind of lies are in the church and obstruct unity?

- Unity is found in correct doctrines rather than a personal relationship with Christ that changes the heart (The Apostles came into unity, but still disagreed on various doctrines. Peter had to be corrected by Paul later.)
- Because unity is found in correct doctrine we must have doctrinal police to examine doctrines and determine who is of the unified faith...
- Because unity is found in correct doctrines we must attack other institutions that hold different doctrines
- Unity is found in correct behavior – dress, diet, day of worship, rather than in a change of heart motive found in relationship with Christ
- Unity is found in accepting legal solutions to our sin problem, rather than in heart transformation to be like Jesus
- Unity is found by conformity to a vote of church leadership, rather than unity is found in a love relationship with God that changes the heart
- The idea that if someone believes or practices religious rituals that are different it is sin
  - Is it sin to wear jewelry? Then what about the father putting a ring on the prodigal's finger
  - Is it sin to eat meat? Then what about Jesus' feeding the thousands with fish?
  - Is it sin to attend church on any day of the week? Like Wednesday prayer meeting or Sunday school?

Why do some people get angry and upset when others believe or practice differently? For instance, why are some in the church upset if others worship on a different day, or wear jewelry, or eat a different diet, or eat in a restaurant on Sabbath, or believe their deceased loved ones are in heaven or not?

Do we get angry or upset if, as non-smokers, we meet someone who believes smoking is good for their health? Why not? Do we get angry or upset if we meet someone who believes brushing and flossing one's teeth is harmful and therefore they don't do it? Why not?

Why do we get angry and upset if others don't believe the same way about God and religion as we do?

Why do some get divisive and seek to punish those who practice differently? Punishment could be removing from church office, spreading rumors or posting blogs attacking a person's teachings, or stoning, shooting, rioting and executing those who offend by speaking ill of one's spiritual leader or books.

Why do people get divisive and attack those who practice differently? Are such behaviors evidences of love?

In our own church, do our leaders deal with differences in love or fear and selfishness?

Is there a difference between attacking ideas, lies, distortions with truth, and attacking people?

Are we to present the truth in such ways that lies are overturned? Can we do that without attacking people who may believe those lies?

Can you love someone who believes differently than you? Can you fellowship with someone who believes differently than you?

Where do you draw the line in such fellowship, when we consider the Bible counsel to separate from those of the world, and the warning that bad company corrupts good character?

Do we find unity in denominational boundaries and doctrinal teaching, or do we find unity in Christ?

I have much greater unity with those who love God and others, regardless of denomination, than those of my denomination who are like the Pharisees in Christ's day, legalistically keeping the rules and aggressively protecting the "standards." What about you?

## SUNDAY

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The lesson refers us to Jesus prayer in John 17. Let's read some of John 17 together:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: <sup>1</sup> "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. [what does this mean? How is Christ glorified and how did He glorify the Father?] <sup>2</sup> For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. [What does this mean? Christ has the responsibility to save humanity] <sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. [What is life eternal? And what is Christ providing?] <sup>4</sup> I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. [what work?] ...

<sup>20</sup> "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. [What does this mean? To be one – is this the same as at-one-ment? Did Jesus come to achieve atonement? What is atonement? How did Jesus achieve it? Is Jesus Himself telling us in this prayer? What is the glory of God? His character – Jesus gives us His character as Jesus possessed and revealed the true character of the Father!]

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* 1984 (Jn 17:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

It is by coming back into the unity of God's character of love that we are reconciled to God. The lies are displaced, trust is reestablished, and the Holy Spirit takes all Christ achieved and reproduces it in us! It is amazing, beautiful, powerful and simple. God is Love. Life is built to operate upon love. Sin is selfishness and destroys. Christ came to reveal God, restore Love into the human species, develop a perfect character, and win us back to trust so that we might receive new hearts and minds, operating again on love.

This is the only unity that matters. This is the unity that comes from God and restores us to eternal life!

## **MONDAY**

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New Testament Illustrations of Unity read first paragraph, "The New Testament..." thoughts?

What was the society of the world like 2000 years ago? Was it much different in method and principle than ours today? In some ways was it even worse?

- Government sanctioned slavery
- Government sanctioned discrimination
- Government sanctioned immorality
- Government sanctioned violence – gladiators
- Government sanctioned worship – paganism

Did Christ and the Apostles seek to change the government? What was the mission of the church when led by Christ and the Apostles? To change the hearts of people.

What about today? What is supposed to be the mission of the church?

Is the church vulnerable to being derailed from its mission? How? Could it be derailed through trying to change the government?

- Abortion law
- Marriage law
- Promoting various candidates etc.

Has the recent laws regarding gay marriage brought more unity? Has the recent court rulings brought greater demonstrations of love, grace, kindness from the Christian community?

What is happening that Christians are responding with something other than love?

Could it be fear? Could these rulings incite fear in the hearts of Christians that cause them to justify unloving actions in order to protect what they believe is sacred?

Is this different that Muslims who act unloving when someone profanes the Prophet? Why do they do it? They believe they are protecting something sacred. Are such behaviors acts of love or motivated by fear?

What should be the Christian response when others act in ways that are contrary to our beliefs?

What should be the Christian response when the government acts in non-Christian ways, passing laws that promote, what we believe, is immoral?

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." We are in the world, not of the world.

We must remember, the United States is NOT God's kingdom on earth. It is a human government, and like all human governments, operates on imposed law, run by selfish humans.

We are to promote the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of one earthly government. And how would you describe the kingdom of God?

And how would God's kingdom respond to the ruling on gay marriage?

With Love and Truth! And what is the truth? In our world, marriage has two aspects. The sacred and the legal. The governments of the earth have the responsibility for legal, statutory aspects of human contract law, property, guardianship, inheritance, etc. including marriage and who can benefit from the legal protections and benefits of marriage contract law.

But human governments cannot and do not determine holiness, sacredness, sanctity, and spiritual unity or blessing associated with marriage. So, when a human government passes laws that homosexuals may marry, they can speak within the bounds of their authority and grant legal privileges for property, health care decision making, tax breaks etc. They cannot make something holy or blessed.

Do we get insecure, threatened, fearful, when activities are promoted that don't correspond to ours? What is the Christian response? To love everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, and to promote the truth of God's character, methods and design and leave it up to the Holy Spirit to convict of sin.

The lesson refers to the imagery of the Bible in regard to the unity that we are supposed to experience in the church. Paul uses the imagery of the body, and how we are all members of the body – how does this imagery help in your understanding of how we are to be unified together?

In the body are all the components alike? Do they all share the same appearance? Do they all have the same strengths and weaknesses? Do all the components of the body have the same abilities? Do they all have the same function? How are they unified?

Peter uses the illustration of a holy building – a temple, sanctuary – built together into a house for the Lord. How does this imagery help?

Who is the builder? Who brings the various pieces into alignment? Who is the building built upon? What is the implication for unity? We cannot be unified with each other until we first are unified with Christ!

## TUESDAY

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Read second paragraph, “The disciples were...” thoughts?

Do you agree? We need to unite upon the gospel – how would you describe the gospel? What is the good news upon which we need to unite?

Is it not the truth about God’s character and methods of love, how He built the universe to run and His plan through Christ to restore His universe back to His original ideal?

I want to thank all of you, here and around the world, who are uniting with us, who are unifying with us on the truth about God’s character of love. Through your support this gospel message is penetrating. Yet, as the message grows so does the opposition.

As you know I will be going to Singapore and Australia to do a series of presentations. I was notified last week, that one of the venues cancelled as a Chaplain was approached by someone who disagrees with this perspective and misrepresented what we teach. When the person who is organizing my schedule asked what was the problem, the Chaplain refused to discuss it.

Many of you are praying for this ministry regularly – we are thankful for your prayers and I would like to ask for your continued prayer, that God will move upon the hearts of people to prepare them to hear and give me the ability to present the truth about His kingdom in the most effective way possible. Also, please pray that doors of opportunity will continue to open and opposition will be moved out of the way.

The lesson speaks about present truth and that the church has been given a mission to prepare the world for Christ’s return, the message of the three angels of Revelation 14 which is the “everlasting gospel in the context of judgment, of obedience, and the Lord’s return.”

What do you think of the idea of the gospel in the context of judgment? Can it be presented in a way that actually obstructs the gospel?

What is the everlasting gospel? The truth about God’s character of love!

What if we present the gospel as Jesus dying to pay or legal penalty, in the context of God sitting in judgment of sin, and Jesus paying the penalty to turn away the Father’s wrath, so God will judge us saved, but that God will judge condemn and punish those who don’t accept the legal payment of Christ? If we present the first angel in this context are we presenting the eternal gospel or are we obstructing it?

It is my position we are obstructing the gospel with these ideas and obscuring the truth and delaying the second coming. The first angel says we are to worship him who made the heavens, earth, seas – in other words the text is telling us we are being called back to worship the Designer, the Creator, and

reject the dictator views of God which infected the church when Constantine converted. God's law is love and God's character is love! This is the eternal good news – God is NOT like Satan alleges, a cosmic dictator who inflicts punishment on law breakers. Sin destroys, God heals!

## **WEDNESDAY**

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Read last two paragraphs, "The Jerusalem Council..." thoughts? What is the lesson suggesting?

Is the lesson suggesting that, when the church meets in official session, and determines a doctrinal issue, that members are to surrender their thinking and agree with the decision of the church leadership?

Thoughts?

- Isn't that the same argument made by the Catholic church to Martin Luther and other Reformers?
- Should the Reformers have accepted the decision of the church councils?
- Should we today go along with the church leadership and General Conference votes, regardless of what the vote says, or only if we are convinced the decision is in harmony with God and His truth?
- What about women's ordination? This argument, the church in General Conference session has voted and the various divisions should abide by that vote. Thoughts?

Those who promote the position of the lesson will quote the following from one of the founders of our church, which was written in 1875:

I have been shown that no man's judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any one man. But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered. (3Testimonies, p. 492, 1875)

Thoughts? Do we say, "well if she said it then we must believe" or do we think for ourselves? Is anyone uncomfortable questioning the decisions of the General Conference? Is anyone uncomfortable questioning after hearing what I just read? Why?

Here are some others quotations from EGW a little later in her life, note the change. For those who believe she was inspired, was she less inspired with these?

If it were possible, **the enemy would clog the wheels of progress, and prevent the truths of the gospel** from being circulated everywhere. With this object **he** leads men to feel that it is their privilege to control the consciences of their fellow-men according to their own perverted ideas. **They dismiss the Holy Spirit from their counsels, and then, under the power and name of the General Conference, they invent regulations through which they compel men to be ruled by their own ideas and not by the Holy Spirit.** {1888 1527.2}

The **plans to obtain control of human minds and ability** are as strange fire, which **is an offense to God**. And **who are those who dare engage in this work?** Men who have revealed that they do not have self-control, that they are not divested of selfishness. Unless these men shall themselves turn unto the Lord, they will die in their sins. **There is scarcely a vestige of genuine truth remaining in them.** The effort to manage others, which is made by those who cannot manage themselves, is one of the greatest fallacies that could exist. Let those who love to rule, begin the work where it should have begun years ago; let them rule themselves, and show that they are in subordination to God's rule, that they have been converted at heart. **Then they will at least not make their fellow-men groan under the galling yoke of their restrictive policy.** Then there will be fewer **prayers sent up to heaven in anguish of heart because of their selfish oppression.** {1888 1528.1} [how many Christians have been discouraged, left the church, because of restrictive rules put upon them by someone in church leadership? How many have failed to experience the grace, peace, love and joy of God, because someone in leadership has made religion an onerous and restrictive set of rules and burdens? Should we blindly surrender our judgment to the General Conference?]

**"It has been some years since I have considered the General Conference as the voice of God."** --17MR 216 (1898). LDE 50.3

One day at noon I was writing of the work that **might have been done at the last [1901] General Conference if the men in positions of trust had followed the will and way of God. Those who have had great light have not walked in the light.** The meeting was closed, and the break was not made. **Men did not humble themselves before the Lord as they should have done, and the Holy Spirit was not imparted.** {LDE 57.1}

Thoughts? Should we blindly adhere to the rulings of the General Conference or any other human body, or should we humbly, prayerfully, study for ourselves and decide for ourselves?

Here is a quotation from one of the pioneers of our church found in *The Desire of Ages*:

**As the light and life of men was rejected by the ecclesiastical authorities in the days of Christ, so it has been rejected in every succeeding generation.** Again and again the history of Christ's withdrawal from Judea has been repeated. When the Reformers preached the word of God, they had no thought of separating themselves from the established church; **but the religious leaders would not tolerate the light,** and those that bore it were **forced to seek another class, who were longing for the truth.** In our day few of the professed followers of the Reformers are actuated by their spirit. Few are listening for the voice of God, and ready to accept truth in whatever guise it may be presented. **Often those who follow in the steps of the Reformers are forced to turn away from the churches they love,** in order to declare the plain teaching of the word of God. **And many times those who are seeking for light are by the same teaching obliged to leave the church of their fathers, that they may render obedience.** {DA 232.2}

Do we expect the final work to be done from the General Conference? Or is the final work to be done by you and me?

Don't be discouraged, embrace the truth about God's character of love and dedicate yourself to sharing it, and when you do, expect all manner of evil to be said against you falsely, because the devil wants to shut down every source of light.

## **THURSDAY**

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Read second paragraph, "Every Christian..." thoughts?

What, according to this, is to be the ambition of the believer? Do you agree?

And is there a connection to revealing Christ in our characters and experiencing unity? Is it not the key?

As I have travelled around the world, I have found the most wonderful unity and bonds of friendship with those who love God and cherish His character of love.

## **FRIDAY**

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Read and discuss question 1 – does this question sound like they are most concerned with presenting God's kingdom of love, or protecting an institution, and even restricting its growth and movement forward in the truth?

Read question 3 – discuss – how do we, move forward in the truth and challenge our church to grow in the most gracious way possible?