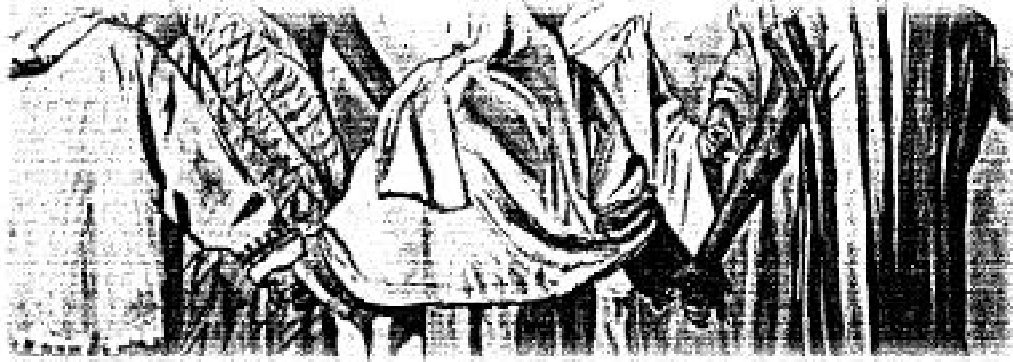


Brothers and Sisters in the Faith



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 26:21-25; John 10:16; John 17:11; Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:2.

MEMORY VERSE: “So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it [good]. Let us make a special point of doing good to those [people] who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NlrV).

CHRISTIANS OFTEN CALL ONE ANOTHER “BROTHER” AND “SISTER” to show the bond they have in Jesus. But when used too much, the words *brother* and *sister* can become meaningless. Also, if we are not careful, these words can be awkward when non-Christians are present. But we should never give up on our “brothers” and “sisters” in Jesus even when we have disagreements with them. As in a family, we need to live with one another. Not every “brother” or “sister” in the church always acts in loving ways.

So there is good reason for us to study our relationships with fellow believers. We will especially think about people who really frustrate us.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: How did Paul describe the differences within church unity? Upon what should our unity depend? What are some of the things that can cause disagreements among ourselves? How did Jesus give us an example in treating Judas? How should we answer those Christians who treat us badly?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 11.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 10

**ONE IN JESUS (Romans 12:4, 5;
1 Corinthians 12:12-27).**

One of the church's greatest challenges is the problem of unity. Many of the first Seventh-day Adventists came from Protestant churches.¹ The Adventist Church then moved into Europe and other parts of the world. As the church grew, it faced many different belief systems and cultures. Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is in more than two hundred countries and is growing fast, especially in the non-Western world.² So there is always the danger of the church growing apart or even splitting into groups if we do not work hard to stay together. We need to stay together so the church can face the challenges ahead. How can we share the three angels' messages³ if we are busy fighting among ourselves?

What is Paul's favorite way to describe Jesus' church? How does this way show the importance of unity? Romans 12:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

"Paul . . . makes a very good example by comparing⁴ the church with the parts of the human body. This comparison⁵ did not start with Paul. Many ancient⁶ writers had made the same point. . . . The members of the Corinthian church would understand Paul's words, 'Suppose the foot says, "I am not a hand. So I don't [do not] belong to the body.'" It is still part of the body' (1 Corinthians 12:15, NIV). . . .

"The very weakest members of the body . . . are still very important. And the parts that we think are less important, we treat with special honor. For example, we do not see the important organs such as the heart, the kidneys, the lungs, the liver, and the stomach. But life cannot go on without them."—Adapted from W. Larry Richards, *1 Corinthians*, The Abundant⁷ Life Bible Amplifier⁸ (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1997), pp. 216, 217.

How did the early church show the kind of unity God wants? Acts 1:14; Acts 12:1; Acts 4:32.

Is your local church showing the kind of unity Paul describes and that

¹Protestant churches—churches that broke away from the Catholic Church during the Reformation (1500s). Protestant churches include churches that came after the Reformation, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

²the non-Western world—countries such as China and Japan; also places such as the countries in Africa and the Middle East.

³three angels' messages—the Bible message for the world today that God wants Seventh-day Adventists to preach. This message is in Revelation 14:6-12.

⁴comparing—showing how things are the same.

⁵comparison—an example that shows how things are the same.

⁶ancient—very old.

⁷abundant—more than enough; rich and full.

⁸amplifier—something that makes something else easier to understand.

the verses in Acts show? If your church is divided, what can you do to bring unity?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 6

BEING DIFFERENT IS BEAUTIFUL (John 17:11, 21).

The McDonald's restaurant chain has thousands and thousands of restaurants worldwide. Whether in Pakistan or in the USA, in Hungary or in South Africa, you will find the *golden arches*. And you can be sure that the food is always the same. The sandwiches always will be the same size and weight. The milk shakes will always come in three flavors and in the same size cups. Some people might call this unity. But this kind of sameness has nothing to do with real unity. Instead, this is uniformity.⁹ There is an important difference between unity and uniformity. We must not think that the unity of the church is the same as uniformity.

How do the following verses describe the unity of the church? What should the church be unified about? Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:2; John 10:16; John 17:11, 21.

“The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not peaceful discussion, not management, not hard work to overcome difficulties. Instead, the se-

cret to unity is union with Jesus.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.

Ellen White's words, are important in helping us understand church unity. We can come from different geographic, national, religious, and economic backgrounds. But at the foot of the cross, we are all the same: We are all sinners in need of God's grace.



Let us be united in Christ.

But the hand is not the foot. The foot is not the eye. The eye is not the heart. All the parts of the body are different. All the parts have different jobs. If the eyes demanded that the heart be the same as the eyes, the body would die. If the heart demanded that the eyes be the same as the heart, the body would be blind.

⁹uniformity—everything is made in the same way; for example, a style of uniform will be the same for everyone who wears that uniform.

Our church members are all so different. They come from different national, geographic, and religious backgrounds. Many of them have quarreled over these differences. For this reason, our unity must be found in a worthy goal that is higher than these differences. That goal must be Jesus and the work of sharing the three angels' messages. On earth, national and political differences always will remain. But Adventist Christians are united in one Savior, one work, and one message. We should never let our differences spoil the unity God wants. It is not always easy to be united. But God calls us to love our enemies. So we certainly should be able to love our fellow church members.



Let us unite to spread the three angels' messages.

Suppose geographic, national, or political problems are dividing your local church. What can you do to pull people to the Cross? The Cross is the only answer to problems that divide us.

¹⁰mission—goal; special work. The goal of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to preach the three angels' messages to the world.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 7

QUARRELS ARE UGLY (Numbers 16:1-3; 1 Corinthians 1:11, 12).

During the 2000 General Conference Session (Convention), Andrews University professor George R. Knight gave a powerful speech about issues he thinks will threaten the church. He said: "If I were the devil, I would get as many Adventists as possible to think they belong to only a tribe (group), a nation, or a race. I would make the church one big power struggle, with all the different people fighting for control. They would not care about the church's mission.¹⁰ But I wish to add that there *are* injustices that need to be corrected. There *are* complicated (hard) situations that can never be made completely straight. I beg that even in the most difficult situations, we behave as born-again sisters and brothers. I wish the people would be able to discuss these complicated situations without forgetting the mission of our church. The mission of our church can help to solve the complicated situations."—Adapted from George R. Knight, "If I Were the Devil," *Adventist Review*, January 2001, pp. 14, 15.

What things cause disunity in the church?

Numbers 16:1-3 _____

Acts 6:1, 2 _____

Acts 15:1, 2 _____

1 Corinthians 1:11-17 _____

Who is responsible? Who will profit? And whose beliefs are correct? These are the most common questions that cause quarrels in the church. The questions can be good. Social and religious groups need to decide what kind of leaders they need to run their organizations. When an organization has smaller groups, there must be a way to make sure that the interests of these groups are protected. Real problems are not to be swept under the carpet (forgotten or ignored). But people who decide to follow Jesus and who want to copy His nature will choose a wise plan. This plan includes peaceful discussions, a better understanding of one another, patience, and love. These things are the keys to solving problems wisely.

Think about the things that caused disunity in the early church. How do these things cause disunity in today's church? Why must we all come to the Cross and

be broken if we are to be united?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 8

**SERVANTHOOD VERSUS (VS.)
POWER PLAY¹¹
(Matthew 20:20-28).**

Being a servant is not our idea of success. We see success as influence, as power, as the ability to direct and control other people.

What principle¹² did Jesus give in answer to the mother of James and John when she asked for a place of special honor for her sons? Matthew 20:20-28.

In Matthew 20:20-28, we see the difference between sinful humanity¹³ and a perfect God. Here is a mother, overeager for the success of her sons. There are the other disciples, angry at what they think is a power play. And remember, these people are all followers of Jesus! But they are all jealous and selfish. Jesus is so different from them. He spoke about the principle¹⁴ of servanthood. But Jesus also lived like a servant! Jesus' living like a servant is hard for jealous, selfish people to understand.

What is Jesus talking about in Mat-

¹¹power play—planning to claim (take over) the power and control of an organization or group of people.

¹²principle—basic rule that is the basis for a specific rule.

¹³humanity—all the people of the world.

¹⁴principle—a basic rule that is the basis for a specific rule.

threw 20:28. How did He explain what it means for Him to be a servant?

Many of the things that threaten to divide the church would go away if we took seriously Jesus' words about being servants to each other. Being great does not mean having an important position. Being great can have a lot to do with power. It is not power as the world sees power. But it is the power to change people's lives, to heal people, to show people God's love and character. This power comes from being a good example and from showing people the character of Jesus. That is true power and greatness.

It is one thing to talk about being a servant. But to act as a servant is another thing. What are some useful things you could do to show the principle of servanthood in your own local church? For example, how does the foot-washing service show the principle of servanthood?



Jesus is our Creator. But He still did the work of a servant.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 9

DEALING (WORKING) WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE¹⁵ (Matthew 26:21-25).

Have you heard of the 20-80 principle? It means that 20 percent of the people working with you cause 80 percent of the problems. All pastors will agree that a rather small percentage of their church members give them most of their problems. Not all people are as sweet and kind as we would want them to be. Some people seriously challenge our Christian experience.

What did Judas do to Jesus? Was this such a terrible thing? Mark 14:43-45; Luke 22:3-6, 47, 48; John 18:3-7.

Few people in history have gone to their grave as infamous¹⁶ as Judas. When he betrayed Jesus, Judas lost eternal¹⁷ life. Jesus knew what Judas would do. But Jesus still tried to save him.

What happened that showed Jesus was still trying to work with Judas? Matthew 26:21-25.

“Judas's heart was not yet fully hardened. Judas had tried to betray the Savior two times. But there was

¹⁵difficult people—people who are not easy to work with.

¹⁶infamous—being famous because you have done something very bad.

¹⁷eternal—living forever.

still an opportunity for Judas to repent.¹⁸ At the Passover supper, Jesus proved He was God by showing what Judas wanted to do. Jesus tenderly included Judas in their last Passover together. But Judas failed to listen to Jesus' last appeal of love. Then the future of Judas was decided. Jesus washed Judas's feet. But Judas still betrayed Jesus."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 720.



Jesus tried hard to work with Judas, even though Judas would betray Him.

Sometimes, the most painful struggles we have are with people who are our brothers and sisters in Jesus. But we should treat these people the way Jesus treated Judas.

Has a brother or sister in Jesus betrayed you? If so, can you treat

that person the same way Jesus treated Judas? Pray for God to help you be kind to him or her.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read the chapter "Who Is the Greatest?" in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 432–442.

"The first disciples were all different in character. . . . So to successfully carry forward God's work, they needed to become united in feeling, thought, and action. This unity was Jesus' goal for them. Jesus tried to bring them into unity with Himself so they would be in unity with each other. The burden of His work for them is shown in His prayer to His Father: 'That all of them will be one, just as you [the Father] are in me [Jesus] and I [Jesus] am in you. I want them also to be in us [the Father and Jesus]. This [unity] will let the world know that you sent me. It [this unity] will also show the world that you have loved those [people] you gave me, just as you have loved me' (John 17:21, 23, NIV). Jesus' prayer for His disciples was that they might be made righteous (holy) through the truth. He prayed with assurance (confidence), because He knew that God's command for unity had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations. He knew that truth given with the power of the Holy Spirit would conquer evil. And He knew the bloodstained

¹⁸repent—to say you are sorry for your sins and then to turn away from a life of sin.

flag would one day wave victoriously over His followers.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,¹⁹ pp. 20, 21.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does a person decide the difference between unchangeable beliefs and cultural ways of doing things that can be changed? Why is it important to know the difference between unchangeable beliefs and cultural ways?
2. Imagine that your local church has a membership of one hundred. Most

members are pleasant and easy to get along with. But a few members are destroying the peace. They have very strong beliefs about what should and should not be done during the worship service. This situation clearly slows down the growth of the church. What would you advise?

SUMMARY: The church must show unity rather than uniformity. There is beauty in our differences as long as we are united in Jesus. As we all learn to surrender at the Cross, we can have the kind of unity Jesus wants for His people.

¹⁹apostles—Jesus’ disciples were called “apostles” after Jesus returned to heaven.