

## 2. Causes of Disunity (4Q 2018—Oneness in Christ)

**Biblical material:** Deut. 28:1–14, Jer. 3:14–18, Judg. 17:6, 1 Kings 12:1–16, 1 Cor. 1:10–17, Acts 20:25–31; Prov. 9:10.

### Quotes

- Disunity will come to the church when the majority seeks to impose convictions on the minority in areas that are not defined by the 28 Fundamental Beliefs.... Disunity will result when all are required to come to an agreement on issues over which we have developed no consensus. *Gordon Bietz*
- If we are a body, then we are one that is afflicted with an autoimmune disease. *Christena Cleveland, Disunity in Christ*
- Disagreements don't cause disunity, a lack of forgiveness does. *Loren Cunningham*
- Honest difference of views and honest debate are not disunity. They are the vital process of policy among free men. *Herbert Hoover*
- Opting for peace does not mean a passive acquiescence to evil or compromise of principle. It demands an active struggle against hatred, oppression and disunity, but not by using methods of violence. Building peace requires creative and courageous action.
- *Pope John Paul II*
- The only separation the Bible knows is between believers on the one hand and unbelievers on the other. Any other kind of separation, division, disunity is of the devil. It is evil and from sin. *Desmond Tutu*
- Always we argue that unity is necessity because disunity goes in favor of the U.S., which are our enemy, and everything that goes in favor of the enemy must be eliminated. That is why we are in favor of unity. *Che Guevara*

### Questions

How would you define the causes of disunity? What is the problem in focusing on the problem? Attacking disunity as wrong is easy—but how is it best resolved? Can agreed statements and church discipline ensure unity? Why/why not? In what ways can the charge of “disunity” be used as a pretext?

### Bible summary

Deut. 28:1–14 enumerates the blessings that Israel will receive if they obey the Lord's commands. In Jer. 3:14–18 the Lord calls for his faithless people to return to him, for he is their husband. The problem is that everyone does what they think is right (Judg. 17:6). 1 Kings 12:1–16 gives the account of Israel's rebellion against the impositions of King Rehoboam. Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 1:10–17 asking “Is Christ divided?” because of their warring factions, and also warns against savage wolves destroying the flock (Acts 20:25–31). Knowing God is true wisdom (Prov. 9:10).

### Comment

The lesson highlights disobedience and carelessness as causes for disunity. But in reality the problem lies much deeper. It is an attitude of rebellion and distrust that brings

suspicion and a refusal to cooperate. In the words of Ellen White, “The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey.” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p.97. You can literally obey, but not be obedient.

True obedience comes from accepting the principles on which the laws are based. You need to recognize that they are true and good. In fact, you would follow those laws even if there was no requirement to obey, because you agree that they are inherently good.

Disunity comes when one or both parties operate from less than altruistic concerns. The use of force has no place, yet all too often in matters of religion compulsion is used. Both sides need to believe that each is operating with good intentions, otherwise disunity and distrust is the result.

Yet all too often the charge of disunity is used as a way of enforcing compliance. By requiring exact conformity to a particular policy or practice, with the threat that to do otherwise would be to cause division and disunity, rulers, even church leaders, have sought to impose their will and their authority.

But this is not Christ’s way. He urged an attitude of respect for one another, even a willingness to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. He never validated the use of force or imposed compliance. While we recognize many aspects that can contribute to disunity, authoritarian attitudes and the use of power are surely the worst. We can agree to disagree over many things, but if Christian self-sacrificing love is replaced by ecclesiastical might, then there is no prospect for true unity.

### **Ellen White Comments**

The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ’s school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls. {11MR 266}

The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties--though there will be much of this to do--but union with Christ. {AH 179.1}

Is Christ divided against Himself? Will He give His people success before they sweep away the rubbish of evil surmising and discord, before the laborers, with unity of purpose, devote heart and mind and strength to the work so holy in God’s sight? Union brings strength; disunion, weakness. United with one another, working together in harmony for the salvation of men, we shall indeed be “laborers together with God.” Those who refuse to work in harmony greatly dishonor God. The enemy of souls delights to see them working at cross purposes with one another. Such ones need to cultivate brotherly love and tenderness of heart. If they could draw aside the curtain veiling the future and see the result of their disunion they would surely be led to repent. {CCh 43}

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