

3. Unity in Christ (3Q 2026 1 and 2 Corinthians)

Biblical material: 1 Cor. 1:12–17, Rom. 1:29, 1 Cor. 1:10, 1 Cor. 3:1–4, Phil. 2:5–8, 2 Cor. 11:23–28, Col. 1:24.

Quotes

- Unity is dependent on the recognition of diversity. *Barry Oliver*
- Before moving away from the topic of unity in diversity it should be noted that unity and uniformity are not the same thing. Some have argued that Adventism must be united in mission, its core message, and in servanthood, but not in everything. In fact, these persons suggest that many issues need to be decided by locality and even by individuals. A movement can be united without being uniform. Unfortunately, in the drive for unity the General Conference has too often failed to note that distinction. One size fits all is too often the goal. In the process it has spawned disunity among various cultural groups. *N.T. Wright*
- Organization was designed to secure unity of action, and as a protection from imposture. It was never intended as a scourge to compel obedience, but rather, for the protection of the people of God. Christ does not drive his people. He calls them... Church force cannot press the church into one body. This has been tried, and has proved a failure. *James White*
- 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*
- 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*
- 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*

Questions

Is Paul making a plea for organizational unity in the church, or to stop the divisiveness of identifying with different church leaders? In pleading for “a united attitude and purpose,” is he asking for a uniformity of action? What was the true cause of divisiveness in the Corinthian church? How should we respond?

Bible summary

In 1 Corinthians 1:12–17 Paul asks if Christ is divided by those who choose different Christian mentors to follow. In Romans 1:29 Paul lists out some of the evil problems: “greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malice, and gossip.” He pleads with the Corinthians to “develop a united attitude and purpose.” (1 Corinthians 1:10). He says that they haven’t grown up, and are still behaving in a worldly way by saying “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” (1 Corinthians 3:1–4). Paul says that they should be humble, serving one another as Jesus did (Philippians 2:5–8). He even encourages them to be more like him (2 Corinthians 11:23–28). In Colossians 1:24 Paul says he suffers for them.

Comment

As always in the great controversy, Satan is constantly seeking to provoke divisiveness and disharmony in the church. In the case of the church in Corinth he appealed to both the members’ former lifestyle, and differences between leaders to develop factions who marked their variation by who they said they followed. Here is a lesson that is still applicable today—our fallen human

nature easily continues aspects of our former lifestyles before conversion, and different leaders/mentors provide rallying points for arguments over the church's direction. This is why there is so much antagonism over candidates for church leadership position, especially at the highest levels.

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.

"The prayer of Christ to His Father, contained in the seventeenth chapter of John, is to be our church creed." Ellen White, *Lift Him Up*, p.296. Instead of 28 Fundamentals, choose John 17, says Ellen White! Quote a contrast to what we usually hear...

In John 17 Jesus prays for his disciples, that they may be one—and we can apply this to the church. As is often mentioned, unity is not uniformity. We are all unique individuals, with all the diversity that God delights in. We do not think the same thoughts and we see things differently. But this should not destroy the unity we have together in Christ. As Galatians 3:28 states, we are all one in Christ Jesus, though we have different ethnicity, social position, and gender.

We are encouraged to live a life worthy of our calling. Our calling is to the one hope in Christ. In this hope we are united; we recognize that there is no other way, no other future apart from God and his promised hope. Here we see the unifying power of this hope to which we have been called, and how God leads through the motivating power of hope. Our message must not be based on fear but on love, not promoting anxiety but providing assurance. We are to be a "spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men," as God's ambassadors at the end of time. All this centers on speaking the truth about God as revealed in Jesus.

Only as we are united in this can we rightly represent God to a dying world. Such unity cannot come about by human plans, but only through being committed to the God of truth who leads us through. We need to be true to this calling, being the representatives of the God who wishes to lead all to such a saving trust in God. In doing so our lives need to reflect what we believe, while our church must demonstrate the oneness that this brings.

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}

