

Causes of **Disunity**

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”
(Prov. 9:10, NKJV).*



While Satan tries to separate us from God and to live in discord with one another, he is no match for our Savior's love, which is the key to us living in harmony with one another.

Introduction *Hikers' Demise*

Prov. 16:25

With a trusted map in their possession, laced boots, and backpacks packed with hiking necessities, the adventure seekers gathered at the mountain's base. Within the mountain, at the trail's end, was utopia, a glimpse of Eden, complete with a waterfall cascading into a crystal-clear pool complemented by endless species of stunning flora, nature's best. A few eager hikers stood aside from their group, a bit nearer to the start of the trail, excited for the journey ahead and a bit peeved by their friends' delay. The trek was soon underway. The majority of the group, enjoying the sights and experience of the journey, moved slowly but steadily up the trail. Our anxious hikers accelerated their ascent and soon found themselves separated from the group. However, their confidence in their hiking abilities and perceived knowledge of the trail prevented any feelings of fear or bewilderment.

Hours later, fatigued, frustrated, and isolated, the self-confident faction succumbed to their reality.

They soon came to a crossroad. A spirit of doubt permeated the aura of the group as they pondered which path they should take. Left, or right? Some considered the option of waiting on the other hikers and consulting the map to confirm the direction, but some, consumed with pride, quickly dismissed that thought. Ultimately there was a separation of ways—some opting to stay and wait, while others, relying on their own volition, chose the path that they perceived to be best and pressed on . . . on to their demise. Hours later, fatigued, frustrated, and isolated, the self-confident faction succumbed to their reality. They were lost.

The hikers' demise lay in their self-confidence, self-sufficiency, and unwillingness to consult the map. Their behavior was the catalyst for the resulting disunity and discord among themselves. Life is a hiking trail, and God, the master cartographer, has provided us, His people, with a map, His holy Word and holy law contained within. Disregarding this holy law (which provides divine guidance and protection) and trusting in self for direction leads to certain loss and chaos. On the other hand, its observance leads to the promise of ultimate utopia and life eternal. It's God's will that we choose the latter. In the upcoming week, we seek to further explore spiritual disobedience, self-reliance, and its direct relation to disunity within the body of Christ.

Steven Ignacio, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago

1 Cor. 1:10;
Phil. 2:5

Evidence *Divided Ideologies*

Many historians have advanced compelling reasons for America's defeat in the Vietnam War. One striking argument is posited by Lieutenant Colonel James Rothrock in his book, *Divided We Fall: How Disunity Leads to Defeat*.¹ He argues that disunity at the domestic level was the dominant factor for the United States' demise in Vietnam, caused by conflicting ideologies about the war abroad. This disunity, he contends, emboldened the opposition to fight against the United States and its allies. Therefore, the media, technocrats, and politicians were not of "one mind" as they confronted the enemies on the battlefield, resulting in a shattering defeat for the United States.

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This historical recount provides a useful perspective for us today as Seventh-day Adventists as we study the causes of disunity in the body of Christ. A division of our beliefs as we face the opposing forces is a perfect recipe for disunity in the church, which undoubtedly will undermine the influence of the church in the twenty-first century. The apostle Paul advises "that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10, NIV). The concern of disunity among the early believers occupied Paul's writings as he understood its negative impact on the mission of the church. Paul encouraged the believers to set aside philosophies and opinions that were diametrically opposed to the Word of God and that fueled controversy and disunity among the believers. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be seen as one unit and not contending or divided entities with various doctrinal perspectives. To be perfectly united in mind and thought is to fundamentally have the mind of Christ as admonished in Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." As a consequence, our passion, mission, and desire to spread the everlasting gospel will be the same. While there may be disagreements on certain points, we will be prepared to submit our ideologies to the Holy Spirit, who will guide us into all truth as our hearts are open to His leading. Consequently, our differences will be ironed out and disunity will be dispelled from among us.

A church divided on biblical principles is on its pathway to conflict and sure disunity.

1. James Rothrock, *Divided We Fall: How Disunity Leads to Defeat* (Milton Keynes, UK: AuthorHouse, 2006).

Logos
The Separation Affirmation

John 4:23

Obedience to the Law (Jer. 3:14–18; Deut. 28:1–14)

The covenant established between God and humanity sees humanity as a constant failure at remaining faithful and taking advantage of the mercies of God. In the book of Jeremiah, Israel is described as “a wife unfaithful to her husband” (Jer. 3:20, NIV), who commits spiritual adultery with the people the nation was called to be a light unto. God, speaking to His prophet, highlighted Israel’s unfaithfulness to Him and His willingness as a merciful God to forgive the people’s adulterous acts against Him. Where His chosen nation had failed to uphold the covenant, God continually reestablished it with the hope that His chosen would be faithful to Him. He communicates to Jeremiah that the separation of Israel need not be—and that if the people would return to Him, accepting His love and law, Israel would be restored and His name be praised.

As parents are responsible for their children, so is God.

God Himself would choose leaders after His own heart to feed His people with knowledge and understanding, not those who would lead the nation into ruin. Israel would look directly to God and not to humans, as John 4:23 says, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” As parents are responsible for their children, so is God. He knows all too well what the absence of the law in our lives ultimately brings: confusion and disunity. God lovingly encourages us through His Word to display humility, allowing Him, and only Him, to lead so that we will receive the blessings He has for us. Today, God still provides opportunities for us to strengthen our obedience and faithfulness to Him, but we, like Israel, persist in rebellion.

Right in His Own Eyes (Judg. 2:11–13; 3:5–7; 17:6; 21:25)

Judges 17:6 retells the sad story of human history. The nation of Israel was meant to epitomize the blessing of a people walking in righteousness. As God’s chosen, the people of Israel did not live up to the expectations that He had for them. The author of the book of Judges paints a picture of a selfish nation in which “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” The children of Israel were supposed to associate with heathen nations to share God. Instead they indulged in self and the desire of the flesh, pleasing themselves with the illicit companionship of their neighbors, contrary to what God had intended and specifically warned against. They relied on Him neither for their needs nor for counsel, but chose the “wisdom” of the carnal rather than that of Him who is wisdom. Ironically, despite their many battles against the cultures of the heathen nations, Israel, God’s people, now became servants and slaves to that very way of life. This was found in their worship of Baalim. As Israel fell deeper

into apostasy and came under the wrath of God, Scripture records multiple examples that show us the consequences of stepping outside of God's plan. For instance, King Solomon allowed himself to be distracted from serving God and was subsequently coerced into serving the heathen gods of his wives. If Solomon, in all his wisdom, could not prevent his own kingdom from becoming divided because of his own carnal indulgences, what about us? We must understand that we are indeed helpless without the guidance of God. When we disregard the guidelines God prepared for us, we get caught up in our own self-righteousness, and in the end our only reward is sorrow and regret. Without God's leadership, the household of faith is left broken down and in want of a Divine presence to restore it.

Division of the Hebrew Nation (1 Kings 12:1–16; Prov. 4:1–9; 9:10; James 1:5)

The division of Israel started years before the debacle between King Rehoboam and his people. This incident illuminated the devastating reality of disunity in Israel. At his coronation a simple request was made of King Rehoboam. He was respectfully asked to lighten the load placed on the people by Solomon. In what appears to be a wise move, Rehoboam asked for time to consider the request and promised to meet with them in three days with a decision. He consulted with both his elders and his peers on the matter. His father's counselors wisely recommended a servant leadership approach to the request received. His friends, however, appealed to his pride and recommended that he prove himself to be mightier than his father. Rehoboam didn't heed the words written by his father in Proverbs 13:10, "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom." The separation of the tribes was a result of King Rehoboam's pride. He failed to lead the people of Israel at a time when they needed sound leadership, a guide who would serve them, a leader who could only be guided by God—one who would show mercy, kindness, and humility, a leader who would bring unity to a nation burdened by sins and the actions of their past kings. Rehoboam did not and could not provide godly leadership. To assert his authority, he "answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him" (1 Kings 12:13). Today we all fall into the same demise as Rehoboam. We have great intentions, but we fail because we are trying to accomplish them on our own, without the wise counsel of others and of God. In the process, we can easily become catalysts for disunity in our churches. Without consulting the law, we set our standards based on what is acceptable to our peers. What have we done? Quite possibly the very same thing.

REACT

1. What are some ways we allow pride to cloud our better judgment by rejecting the Holy Spirit?
2. Who has more influence over your decisions—your peers, your elders, or God?
3. Are you motivated by being well liked rather than by being true to your calling in Christ?

Donna-Marie Dowden, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago

Testimony *Unity Enshrined in the Law?*

Deut. 28:1–14;
James 1:5;
1 Cor. 1:10–17

“There is a great and solemn work to be done for Seventh-day Adventists, if they will only be converted. The great trouble is the lack of unity among them. This is a sin in the sight of God,—a sin which, unless God’s people repent, will withhold from them his blessing.”¹

“How sad that so many churches misrepresent the sanctifying influence of the truth, because they do not manifest the saving grace that would make them one with Christ, even as Christ is one with the Father! If all would reveal the unity and love that should exist among brethren, the power of the Holy Spirit would be manifest in its saving influence. In proportion to our unity with Christ will be our power to save souls.”²

“The great trouble is the lack of unity among them.”

“In the work of soul saving, the Lord calls together laborers who have different plans and ideas and various methods of labor. But with this diversity of minds, there is to be revealed a unity of purpose. Oftentimes in the past the work the Lord designed should prosper has been hindered because men have tried to place a yoke upon their fellow workers who did not follow the methods which they regarded as the best.”³

“Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith. If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases, without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren?”⁴

REACT

1. How can differing personalities and talents cause disunity in the body of Christ?
2. What role do the commandments of God play in the breakdown of unity in the church?

1. Ellen G. White, “The Work Before Us,” *Review and Herald*, April 14, 1903, p. 7.

2. Ellen G. White, “One, Even as We Are One,” *Bible Training School*, February 1, 1906, p. 130.

3. Ellen G. White, “A Missionary Education,” *Review and Herald*, February 6, 1908, p. 24.

4. Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, pp. 201–203.

Judg. 21:25; 3:7;
 Psalm 1;
 Prov. 16:25;
 Jer. 3:14;
 James 1:5

How-to The “I” Syndrome: Symptoms

You may be sick and not even know it. Sick unto death—spiritual death, that is. It just might be that you’ve got the “I” syndrome, a very dangerous disease. I myself have had it and didn’t know for years. I sat in the pews of my church infecting others, letting its gross side effects permeate my church and family, leading them to believe that I was healthy, our disunity was normal, and our relationships were A-OK. Truth is, most of us have already been infected. We need to know the signs.

Truth is, most of us have already been infected.

“I” syndrome symptoms:

The law isn’t really law. You neglect the study of the Word or use it contrary to God’s divine leading. You may find yourself relying on your own intelligence and wisdom rather than God’s, overturning and disregarding His counsel for your life and relationships. As a result, you’re found in conflict with other believers because “your” law and “the law” simply cannot exist in harmony.

Prayer is the absolute last resort. When sick, you experience delusions, triggered by your environment and the enemy. You are led to truly believe that you can solve your own problems. Again, because your consultation with God often comes after your lack of submission and communication with Him, you find yourself feeling desolate, far away from His abiding Spirit and the fellowship of brethren.

You prefer the sound of served over serving. Your zeal for ministering to others is either low or geared toward your own merit. You measure ministry by the praise of others. When those around you question your motives, you become defensive and feel as though your worth and time go unappreciated. You serve yourself, your desires, and your pleasures first, regardless of the spiritual and physical needs of those around you.

You find yourself on a bus to nowhere and you’re driving. Most often, those affected by the “I” syndrome find themselves isolated and in discord with the community of believers. Instead of allowing God to mend their hearts and relationships, they continue to assume control over their own lives. However, reliance on their own strength and not allowing Jesus Christ to lead only makes them sicker and less likely to be cured in the future. They’ve hopped on a bus, with no GPS, heading away from the care of their Savior and Redeemer.

REACT

1. Do you see symptoms of “I” syndrome in your own life?
2. What steps can you take to remedy this illness?

Khaffi Beckles, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago

Discord in the Symphony

Judg. 2:15;
1 Cor. 1:10;
Gal. 2:4–8

You are sitting in the concert hall, and everyone is quiet, waiting for the harmonious sounds to rise from the instruments before them. The conductor raises his baton, and the first notes float into the air. As the sound progresses and the conductor puts all that he has into eliciting the glorious sound from the musicians, some musicians decide that they no longer feel they wish to play the assigned music or follow the cues given by the conductor. Others may have a personal bias against the conductor and decide to play music contrary to what is expected to embarrass the conductor. In deviating from the music or playing an entirely different song, they disrupt the awe-inspiring environment created by the conductor, producing cacophony.

There are times when we place our own human interpretation on the Holy Scriptures.

Just as discord arose when the musicians disregarded the written music or the directions of the conductor, disunity is inevitable the moment God's people turn away from the plain "Thus saith the Lord." When we disobey the guides given by God in His Word, chaos ensues. There are times when we place our own human interpretation on the Holy Scriptures. With everyone interpreting the Holy Scriptures as they see fit, there will be opposing themes, leading to confusion. Just as a musician learning an instrument consults someone who knows how to play the instrument, shouldn't we, then, go to God for help in understanding all things spiritual? (James 1:5).

When we no longer rely on God and His Word to transform us, we harbor certain prejudices against members of the church. We may develop biases because of people's cultural background or history before they accepted Christ. We sometimes find ourselves forming cliques in the church or refusing to interact with certain members simply because we don't like them and cannot explain why. Even though that person may come to us with inspired truth and we recognize it as truth, we rebel against it or dismiss it simply because of our preconceptions.

It seems that God's people have come to accept disunity as being a natural part of the church. We have adopted the saying "Let's agree to disagree." In doing this we are fostering a spirit of disagreement (1 Cor. 1:10).

REACT

1. Is there anything that you are currently doing that is contributing to disunity in your local church?
2. Is it possible for disunity to yield a positive outcome? How so?

Danielle Ignacio, Arima, Trinidad and Tobago

Mark 3:25

Exploration *A House Divided Cannot Stand*

CONCLUDE

In Mark 3:25, Jesus' words serve as a compelling reminder: "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (NKJV). The book of Judges tells us of a divided and defeated people because of Israel's pursuit of carnal indulgences, idolatry, and pride. In the New Testament the church faced similar challenges. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul advises against sectarianism, beseeching the people of Corinth that they need to be of the same spiritual mind. The progression of the church was of utmost importance then, as it is now. As Satan continuously attempts to bring disunity into the church, we must prevail against him, moving in one accord in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

CONSIDER

- Observing the members of the church you attend. Is there any obvious separation among the brethren? What are some of the causes? What is the solution? Discuss this separation in class this Sabbath.
- Designing an artistic piece that contrasts the environments of unity and disunity.
- Writing and performing a skit that illustrates the different attitudes that contribute to disunity.
- Writing a personal journal entry in which you reflect on your role in disunity in the church.
- Thinking about members who have been discouraged because of disunity in the church and reaching out to them.
- Praying for your church that their eyes will be opened to the reality of disunity and that with God's guidance they move toward a solution.

CONNECT

Ellen G. White, "The Church's Great Need," *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887.