

# lesson thirteen

DECEMBER 22–28

## *Final Restoration of* **Unity**

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*“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”  
(2 Pet. 3:13, NKJV).*



Though there are many sorrows in this world, God wants us to remember that He is coming back to restore the world so that we can live with Him for eternity.

1 John 1:7-2:2

## Introduction *Unity From the Inside Out*

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me” (John 17:21, ESV). In literature, there are three types of conflict that propel a plot forward: man versus nature, man versus man, and man versus himself. It is the latter conflict, man versus himself, that is pertinent to church unity.

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### **We have found our home in abiding in Christ in us.**

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“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:7, 8, ESV). Scripture shows us that there is an innate internal conflict in our souls, a grand battle between light and darkness, a conflict that is evident in our minds, hearts, and behaviors on a daily basis. So as divided individuals, how can we expect to become a united church? What does it mean to be united to oneself?

Being united to oneself is not perfection. Perfection is not what the Father is after. No, His desire is much deeper. His desire is a heart that is oriented in a yes to His commandment. His heart is for us to abide in Him in the love that He has shown us through His mandates.

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3, ESV). John tells us we will sin. And he gives us the solution. “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (verses 1, 2, ESV).

So walking in the light is a daily heart orientation. It is a choice to follow the ultimate commandment to love. And it is a humble choice to continuously go back to the Cross with the ugliness of our flesh. This is the way to become an integrated whole. This is the way of light.

When we abide in the light, John tells us, we will have fellowship with one another. No longer will we look to others to complete us because we have found our home in abiding in Christ in us. We are free. Free to enjoy each other fully. Free to serve each other joyfully. Free to call out each other’s gifting without envy. But that freedom begins in our own hearts.

# *Unity and Diversity: How Jesus Enables What We Have Always Sought*

Isa. 11:1–10; 65:21–25;  
John 14:1–3;  
2 Cor. 4:16–18;  
Rev. 21:22–27

## **Encouragement From Jesus (John 14:1–3)**

John 14:1–3 contains Jesus' address to the disciples following the Last Supper. In the face of their concerns, Jesus directs the disciples to reaffirm their trust in God and in Him. He continues with the famous line, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (NRSV). While the text leaves some room for interpretation regarding Jesus' "Father's house" and what is meant by "many rooms" (NIV), the larger point is clear. Jesus is leaving, but He encourages His disciples by reminding them that He is leaving so that He can prepare a place for them. It is noteworthy that the living situation described by Jesus is one of intimacy. The redeemed all live together under the same roof. This statement highlights the importance of unity in the world made new. It is not enough that we must learn to live with God—we must also learn to live with one another.

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## **A Vision of Peace (Isa. 11:1–10)**

Isaiah 11, particularly verses 6–10, paints a picture most of us can scarcely fathom—natural enemies, the strong and the weak, living in nonexploitive harmony. Perfect unity in diversity. The animals are each different, which in the past led to exploitation of those differences for the advantage of each, often at the other's expense. But now, each animal lives in peace with the other. None "hurt or destroy" (verse 9) in this reality. While some might see this peaceful existence as a result of God's perfect fulfillment of their needs, a closer reading of the passage indicates that the animals' natures themselves are changed. The carnivores no longer eat meat, as the bear and lion graze next to the cow and ox. It's not that God feeds them meat and thus removes their need to hunt, establishing peace between hunter and hunted. No—God actually changes their nature to eat grass instead of meat. Perhaps this passage refers to more than just animals. Perhaps it is a promise of the renewal we, too, will experience in full upon Christ's return. Perhaps we will be as surprised at our own transformation as an onlooker would be watching a tiger graze on grass.

## **God's Holy Community (Rev. 21:22–27)**

John's vision described in Revelation 21 is one with which most Adventists are familiar. Of note to this study is the condition that drives the remarkable

scene unfolding before the beloved disciple. There is no temple, because of God's sufficiency (verse 22). There is no sun, because of God's sufficiency (verse 23). The nations walk by the city's light, because of God's sufficiency (verse 24). While it may seem an obvious point, it is worth remembering that God is at the center of the saved city's unique structure and function. The New Jerusalem is not just a collection of God's people—it is a community whose existence is enabled by God's sufficiency. John refers to "nations," emphasizing the diversity present within God's saved community. Despite this diversity, unity exists within the city. How is this possible? It's all made possible through the unifying salvation found in Jesus. While each person is unique, they are all saved by the same God. This passage reminds us that our unity is found in our commitment to Jesus. This is what makes paradise possible.

### **Work, in Heaven? (Isa. 65:21–25)**

Many associate heaven with vacation. They imagine eternity involves the enjoyment of sandy beaches, peaceful meadows, or gorgeous mountains. While this may be true, there's another dimension to heaven that many overlook—work. While many may not envision a paradise where they continue to work, chapter 65 of Isaiah paints a different story. Activities mentioned include building houses, living in houses, planting vineyards, and eating their fruit (verse 22). However, the most significant portion of this section of scripture comes in the following verses, which give a promise regarding the community in which the building, living, planting, and eating will take place. Gone are the injustices witnessed before. Gone is the vanity and endless striving that permeates human's work. In its place is found blessing, attentiveness, and peace—all derived from God. This is life as it was originally designed. We may think heaven excludes work, but even work is redeemed by Jesus.

### **A Final Admonition (2 Cor. 4:16–18)**

Many of us struggle to understand why God and His will often seem hidden from our perception, despite our sincere efforts to discover Him and understand His will. Paul reminds his readers that much of the spiritual life deals in unseen things. However, one day in the future, clarity will be granted, we will see God like never before. In the same way, our hope of perfect diversity and perfect unity in Christ must also depend on the coming of something we cannot perceive. There are many reasons to be joyful about Jesus' second coming—the restoration of the earth, the full renewal of our human nature, and the end of sin and death. But one of the more overlooked reasons for joy is found in the unity that will come from a community singularly committed to Christ and His kingdom. This is the much sought-after condition for peace, which will be completely fulfilled with the restoration of creation.

### **REACT**

Why must Jesus be the center of the church's unity? What can result when the body of believers places other ideals in Christ's place as the standards of unity?

## Testimony *Unity*

Eph. 4:2–6

“In union there is strength; in disunion there is weakness. God’s chosen ones are to reveal to the world their union one with another. It is not possible for a few to walk to heaven alone because they can agree with no others. God’s people are to be a unit. If some entertain ideas so peculiar that others cannot accept them, they should compare notes in a teachable spirit, and all should be willing to learn. They should make the most strenuous efforts to be one, to come into the unity of the faith in the bonds of peace.

### “Our names are registered as Christians.”

“Our names are registered as Christians. We go to the Lord’s table; we profess to be sons and daughters of God, members of the Lord’s family, children of the Heavenly King. But too often those who claim to love Jesus, deny him by their lack of confidence in one another. Too often evil is watched for, actions are viewed in the worst light, words are misconstrued and misinterpreted. Many talk earnestly about the faults of others, but their own faults trouble them little. If they would devote their voices to the confession of their own sins, it would be better. God knows the ways of his children. Every word, every thought, every motive, is open before the eyes of him who sees all things. Then let us show that we love Jesus by enthroning him in our hearts, by denying self for the sake of others. Let us work together harmoniously, as staunch members of one family. . . .

“The word of God clearly points out our duty. We are to cultivate kindness and forbearance and love.”<sup>1</sup>

### **REACT**

1. Can unity and diversity go hand in hand, or are the realities either/or? Is unity still possible when church members disagree?

2. Think about a topic that divided your church in the past. How was unity accomplished? Think about a topic that currently divides your church. What can you do to help create unity?

3. Does unity apply only within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, or are there ways for Christians of different denominations to unite? How could you be a part of that unity?

1. Ellen G. White, “Christian Unity,” *Review and Herald*, April 27, 1897.

Heb. 10:24, 25

## Evidence *Recovered Connection*

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24, 25, ESV). According to this passage, Paul understands the necessity of banding together here on earth as a prerequisite to being “caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). This imperative for humanity to connect with one another can be found throughout the Bible as a remedy to humankind’s sinful nature, which has caused separation from God and division from one another.

### **Hope is the single, most powerful weapon against fear!**

Made in the image of God, the Three in One, it is unnatural for humankind to live divided. Resting at the foundation of this division can be found the deteriorating influence of fear. Examining the lives of Adam and Eve, we can see that through indulged disobedience, they ran from the sound of God’s voice and, sadly, from each other. Instead of taking responsibility for their own actions, they looked to cast blame elsewhere, abandoning the foundation of their relationship—cleaving to become one. However, their fears are relieved by the promised defeat of the serpent, the very cause that instigated their separation.

Jesus—the fulfillment of this promise, crushing the head of the serpent—comforts His followers, “Let not your heart be troubled. . . . Where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1, 3). This begins to implant *hope* in the hearts of those who follow Him, opening the doors for proper connection to exist among us.

Hope is the single, most powerful weapon against fear!

Banding together is essential to facilitate proper relationships among us. In Acts 2:1, the disciples of Christ are together in one place, with one accord, ready to receive the power that will enable them to preach the gospel to the world. They understood that connection with one another and with God was key in fulfilling the command Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19, to go to all the world.

Going back to Hebrews 10:24, 25, Paul exhorts the people of God not to forsake the assembling of themselves as they see the day approaching. What day? The second coming of Christ! The blessed hope is that one day you and I, together, will be able to enjoy the presence of the Lord for all eternity. Nonetheless, before that day comes, we must enjoy the sweet fellowship that comes with banding together. As we grow in wisdom and stature, let us never forget to grow in favor with God and with those whom we come in contact with every single day!

# How-to First-Class Heavenly Seats

1 Sam. 16:7;  
Luke 6:45;  
1 Thess. 4:13–18

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18. Trumpet blasts overpower your hearing. Light brighter than a thousand suns pierces your squinting eyes. A soft force wafts you up slowly toward the epicenter of this cloudlike group of winged messengers. You're going home; Jesus has come!

But as you rise, you look around. Some friends and family have to wait. Fewer angels surround them; they can't quite hear the trumpets. As your eyes adjust to the blinding light, you notice that Jesus draws nearer to some than to others. Seemingly, Jesus isn't too excited to save them . . .

## Do you treat people as A-class and B-class in your mind?

Is that how you picture the Second Coming? Or have you always assumed that Jesus loves us equally and is excited to have us all with Him in heaven? If that's how you assumed Jesus is, are you that way? Or do you treat people as A-class and B-class in your mind?

As Christians, "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13, NKJV). In God's new heaven and new earth, all broken relationships are healed (Isa. 11:1–10). And here's the key: God wants heaven to start in us today (Matt. 6:10).

The real-world application is where heavenly living can be messy. So here are a few ideas to help us overcome our tendency to have A and B classes:

*Know God's love.* It's simple; you can't give something you don't have. If you're insecure about God's love for you, then you'll fumble every time you try to share His love (Luke 6:45; 1 John 4:19).

*Review your perspective.* Whenever you feel the urge to raise your nose at someone (meaning they're probably annoying or weird, etc.), listen to God's Spirit as He tells you what He thinks about that person. Can God help you see as He does? (1 Sam. 16:7; John 9:5–7).

*Be the initiator.* Often, we expect the other person to apologize or repent or change their ways first. But if both people do that, change will never come, and the hurt will continue. Instead, be OK with the awkward feeling of breaking the ice; it's worth it (Matt. 5:23, 24).

### REACT

Can you think of people with whom you wish the relationship was better or that the baggage could be forgiven? Have you done everything in your power to make a change?

Joshua Hester, Council Bluffs, Iowa, USA

Rom. 12:9–21;  
1 Cor. 12:12, 13;  
Phil. 2:1–4;  
Eph. 4:1–6

## Opinion

# *Unity in the Body of Christ*

Ever since the first century, the church has struggled with unity, disagreeing on all sorts of topics. With all of the different teachings and beliefs and world-views that are out there today, how can we ever hope to be united as a church? Can a house that is divided stand?

God gave us a gift so that we could be unified to have love within us and among one another. The gift He gave was the person of the Holy Spirit! God gave us a Helper and Comforter. God no longer dwells partially in a sanctuary made by humans but in the sanctuary of our hearts, which He made. He desires us. We need to be of one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit doesn't dwell within the people of God, they have no part with God and He has no part with them. The Holy Spirit is the one who unites the kingdom of God into one body and purpose.

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We must be united in a love-filled, Christlike community and be fulfilling God's will and purpose for His church as ambassadors of the ministry of reconciliation. We are to be united by the love for our Creator and the purpose of His will. Too long have many of us not heeded the Spirit's calling to love our brothers and sisters in the church, using our sinfulness as a crutch. We must submit ourselves to the Spirit so that He can fulfill within us the law and character of God. We need to have produced in us the good fruit of righteousness.

God is calling us to make a stand for His truth, which is the gospel of love—not just intellectually but also in word and deed. We need to reach out in love to the lonely, hurting, needy, and oppressed within the family of God, as well as invite those who have yet to accept the wonderful gift. Are we praying hard enough for the Holy Spirit to fill us, use us, and transform us? Are we setting aside our pride to allow room for God's love to grow in the soil of our hearts?

### **REACT**

1. What is one thing you can do this week to seek spiritual unity with your spiritual family?
2. Whom in your life does God bring to mind who needs to know the love of God? How could you be a tangible expression of God's love to them this week?

## Exploration

# Our Guide for a Common Purpose

Col. 3:12–14

**CONCLUDE**

Life is chock-full of traditions that involve groups of people coming together with a common purpose: holidays, weddings, volunteer work, business. And, as we have been studying this week, unifying with purpose under the love of Christ as His living and breathing body on earth. Where there is unification, accomplishment is inevitable. When it comes to progress, the ways to move forward are not always clear. Moving forward can also be intimidating when it comes to change. The beauty is, we don't have to face the future alone or be afraid. We have each other. And with God's love and guidance we can have peace, knowing that we are on the right path.

**CONSIDER**

- Thinking of challenges facing your church members' lives and gathering a prayer team to pray for them. And if possible, pray over them and show your personal support.
- Surprising your pastor or elder (and their family if applicable) with a home-cooked meal. Often pastors are busy behind the scenes doing a lot of amazing work to unify the congregation. Show them their hard work is noticed. An added step could be to get a group together to make more than one meal. This is another opportunity to unify for a common purpose.
- Writing a letter to a person whom you've struggled to get along with in the past to either build up that relationship with affirmations or mend a relationship that has been broken. Pray for inspiration. Steps toward healing the broken relationships of our pasts can bring people together in a powerful way that creates unity.
- Organizing a group of friends from school or church to go on a camping trip. Those who play together stay together. And by making valuable memories, you will be creating a foundation for beautiful relationships. As a bonus, add team-building exercises to the outing.
- Going to a garage sale and collecting random items. Use them to build a sculpture that represents unity in Christ. Get creative! Post a photo of the sculpture on Facebook and write a short blurb about what it means to you.

**CONNECT**

Romans 6:1–10; 12:3–8; Galatians 3:26–28; Ephesians 1:3–14; 4:11–16; Philipians 2:1–11.

Ellen White, "Christian Unity," *Review and Herald*, April 27, 1897.

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*Cassi Fitzpatrick, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA*

## *Revelation of Jesus Christ*

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2019, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

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### **Lesson 1 The Gospel From Patmos**

**Logos:** Rev. 1:1–8

**Memory Text:** “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” (Revelation 1:3, NKJV)

**Key Thought:** Revelation’s prophecies are an expression of God’s care for His people. They point us not only to the shortness and fragility of this life but also to salvation in Jesus and our calling to spread the gospel.

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### **Lesson 2 Among the Lampstands**

**Logos:** Rev. 1:9–2:4

**Memory Text:** “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21, NKJV)

**Key Thought:** The Lord revealed to John some mysteries of this life and the struggles it brings. The sanctuary scene shown to him provided him with the assurance of Christ’s presence and care—an assurance that he was to pass on to the churches and to the succeeding generations of Christians throughout the centuries until the end of this world’s history.

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