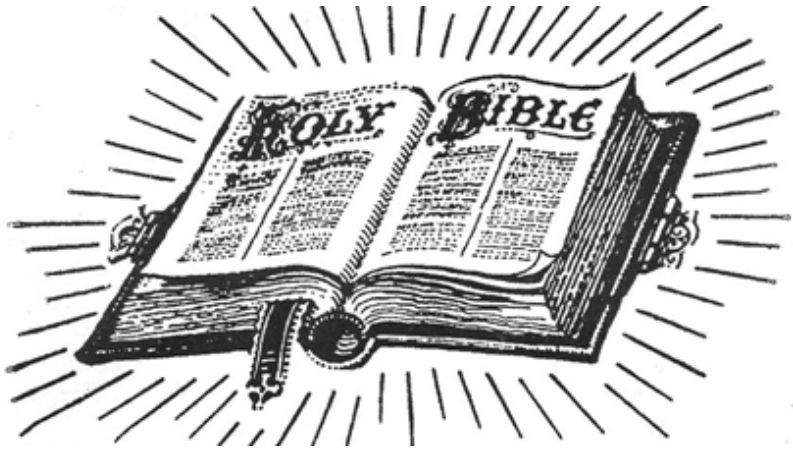


Bible Lessons



“...Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee...for we be brethren.”

Genesis 13:8

Volume 49, No 4

October • November • December

2017

Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church

Edited by Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

In This Issue: *Reflections* contributed by

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NOTICE

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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR FOURTH QUARTER, 2017

***BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF BROTHERHOOD AND
UNITY***

The burden for this series of lessons centers on the Bible doctrines both of the brotherhood of man and the oneness and unity of believers. I have been specifically impressed that there is urgent need for instruction in this area of doctrine, especially in this time of great turmoil in our country.

As we study, let us ask ourselves, "What does God say about this subject?" Not, "How do I feel about this?" or, "What has my family/school/culture always thought about this?" Let us be honest; God's Word may reveal some inconsistencies in what we say we believe and how we actually live. We may have unknowingly picked up a worldly perspective and allowed some very carnal, unsanctified thinking to motivate our words and actions.

My prayer is that God will bring us "back to the blessed old Bible; back to the light of His Word." I pray also that the seeds sown in these lessons will bring forth fruit unto life eternal.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

OCTOBER 1, 2017

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

In the Beginning

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Genesis 3:20 And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

After the Flood

Genesis 9:18 And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.

19 These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.

Genesis 10:32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

Words of Job, Solomon and Malachi

Job 31:15 Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?

Proverbs 22:2 The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.

Malachi 2:10 Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?

New Testament Teachings

Acts 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. (See also Acts 10:15.)

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

MEMORY VERSE And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.

—Acts 17:26

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures teach how all of mankind came from one father; they emphasize that because we have one Maker/Creator/Father, we are all brethren, of one blood, before Him, Who regards us all equally and without partiality.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 2:7 “Man” (literally, *adam*): man; mankind; human being.

Genesis 2:22 “Made he a woman”: literally, *built* he a woman. The woman was made entirely from Adam’s body and he declared, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh...she was taken out of Man.”

Acts 10:28 “An unlawful thing”: In Moses’ law, God commanded the Jews not to intermarry or enter into covenants with the Gentiles (Deuteronomy 7:2-6), but the Pharisees perverted this command and carried it much farther. The strict Jew would not enter a Gentile’s house, nor sit on the same couch, nor eat or drink out of the same vessel, nor conduct friendly or commercial transactions.

Acts 10:34 “Respecter”: take; receive; accept. To receive a person, give him access to oneself; also, to regard anyone’s power, rank, external circumstances, and on that account to do some injustice or neglect something; to show partiality. “Persons”: the face. “The appearance one presents by his wealth or poverty, his rank or low condition; outward circumstances, external condition; so used in expressions which denote to regard the person in one’s judgment and treatment of men.” See Luke 20:21 and Galatians 2:6. —From *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*.

Acts 17:26 “Of one blood”: *blood* is omitted from some manuscripts, and the reading is “Of one,” meaning Adam. Paul was addressing the Athenians, who fancied themselves to be “self-produced.” They felt the barbarians were by nature meant to be slaves of the Greeks. “The declaration of the unity of mankind was a wholly strange message to proud Athenians, who believed themselves to be a race apart, not only from the ‘barbarians,’ whom all Greeks regarded as made of other clay than they, but from the rest of the Greek world” (*MacLaren Expositions of Holy Scripture*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

God created Adam, and then, from Adam’s own flesh and blood—He did not create a creature separately from dust—He made a woman, man’s helper, suitable and fit for him, his counterpart.

From this union—one blood (Eve was flesh of Adam’s flesh and bone of his bone)—came all families, or nations, of the earth. After the flood destroyed the earth, the eight survivors then re-populated the earth, the people still being descendants of one, that is Adam.

Our verses from Job, Proverbs and Malachi all reinforce the truth of all nations of mankind being children of one father, and not only one *natural* father, Adam, but one *spiritual* Father and Creator, God.

Science backs up this creation truth. “A genus can have many species. Organisms of different species of the same genus cannot produce a fertile offspring if interbred together. Mule is a classic example of this. It is a product of a donkey and a horse which are two different species belonging to the same genus (Equus)” (www.differencebetween.net/science/nature/difference-between-genus-and-species).

Scientifically, the nations of men are not *different species of one genus*, but *variations of one species*. There is “agreement in the physiological and pathological phenomena in them all, by the similarity in the anatomical structure, in the fundamental powers and traits of the mind, in the limits to the duration of life, in the normal temperature of the body and the average rate of pulsation, in the duration of pregnancy, and in the unrestricted fruitfulness of marriages between the various [groups]” (*Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*).

Ken Ham, author of *Answers in Genesis* writes: “As a result of Darwinian evolution, many people started thinking in terms of the different people groups around the world representing different ‘races,’ but within the context of evolutionary philosophy. This has resulted in many people today, consciously or unconsciously, having ingrained prejudices against certain other groups of people...However, all human beings in the world today are classified as *Homo sapiens*. Scientists today admit that, biologically, there really is only one race of humans. For instance, a scientist at the *Advancement of Science Convention* in Atlanta stated, ‘Race is a social construct derived mainly from perceptions conditioned by events of recorded history, and it has no basic biological reality.’”

In Acts, Peter is speaking to Cornelius about the vision God gave him concerning his ingrained prejudices toward people who were not Jews. God let him know that all nations were equal before Him,

and he was not to call any man “common” or “unclean.” Later in the book of Acts, Paul spoke to the Athenians on Mars’ Hill, and his words cut right across the proud prejudices of the Greeks, re-establishing the truth and purpose of God’s creation of man.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *One Human Father:* Cite the Scriptures which give proof to this.
2. *One Heavenly Father:* Which Scriptures show the equality of all mankind before Him?
3. *Root and Answer:* What popular atheistic theory perpetuates ignorance and racial prejudice? What is the answer to the problem?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

“Those consistently living out their Christian faith realize that the forced enslavement of another human being goes against the biblical teaching that all humans were created in the image of God and are of equal standing before Him (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Indeed, the most ardent abolitionists during the past centuries were Bible-believing Christians. John Wesley, Granville Sharp, William Wilberforce, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., and Thomas Clarkson all preached against the evils of slavery and worked to bring about the abolition of the slave trade in England and North America. Harriet Beecher Stowe conveyed this message in her famous novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. And of course, who can forget the change in the most famous of slave traders? John Newton, writer of ‘Amazing Grace,’ eventually became an abolitionist after his conversion to Christianity, when he embraced the truth of Scripture” (Ken Ham, *Answers in Genesis*).

The great problems of our day—discrimination against and murder of the unborn, the deterioration of marriage, racial unrest—can all be resolved by going back to the teachings of the Bible, especially these basic truths regarding the origin of man, the Divine institution of marriage, and the brotherhood of mankind. Through

study of the Scripture and the scientific evidence we can receive great enlightenment and liberation of the mind from the incorrect notion of *races*. *There is just one race*.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Growing up among seven children, including five boys all born within five years of each other, one of the quickest ways for me to receive discipline from my parents was to get into a physical altercation with one of my other brothers. Fistfights just weren't tolerated. Yet there were many times when my brothers and I would get into sharp disagreements and verbal spats, and while not coming to physical blows, the sour attitudes and raised voices would invariably require the intervention of our parents.

One such Saturday morning when I was around 8 or 9 years old, one of my younger brothers and I began to argue over something meaningless, the commotion eventually progressing to a major disturbance in the household. My mother bolted from her bedroom and lined all five of us boys up in front of her for family devotion, and beginning one of her legendary singing practices proceeded to teach us some lyrics she had just written that morning while listening to us bicker. To this day, I can't think of the lyrics she taught us without thinking of how it must have grieved her to see her boys unable to get along peacefully all the time.

In much the same way, how it must grieve the heart of our Heavenly Father to see how mankind has forsaken His peace: nations at odds against nations, ethnicity versus ethnicity, animosity amongst political parties, gender wars, etc.

Yet, unity is so important to Him and abundantly evident in the Scriptures. Both of the divine institutions He has set up on earth require unity: marriage and His church. In fact, Jesus himself prayed that His disciples would be one just as He and His Father are one.

As His Church, do not we all have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all (Ephesians 4:5-6)? Just as my mother desired for her boys, are we as His people presenting the beautiful picture of unity to the world around us? Lord, help it to be so!

—Bro. Fari Matthews

OCTOBER 8, 2017

THE UNITY (ONENESS) OF BELIEVERS, PART ONE

One BODY

I Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. (See also Romans 12:4-5.)

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20 But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

MEMORY VERSE: Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. —I Corinthians 12:27

CENTRAL THOUGHT: One way the unity of believers is represented in Scripture is by comparing it to a physical body, which is composed of many members operating under one head. By the spiritual birth we are all built into one body, operating under one Head, Who is Christ.

WORD DEFINITIONS

I Corinthians 12:13 “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body”: “The baptism here referred to is spiritual birth. It is therefore taught in God’s word that men can enter the church only through the birth of the Spirit” (*Biblical Trace of the Church* by W. G. Schell). “This again proves that the birth which inducts us into the one body—church, or family of God—is not water baptism, but the work of the Spirit” (*Christian Baptism, The Lord’s Supper and Feet Washing* by H. M. Riggle).

I Corinthians 12:24 “Tempered”: to mix together; to co-mingle; to unite.

I Corinthians 12:25 “Schism”: split or gap; a rent, as in a garment; a division. “Care”: Usually the word was used in a negative connotation, as in *worry* or *anxious care*, but in this sense it means *to look out for; to take thought; provide for; to be concerned*.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Evidently, the church at Corinth had written to Paul for instruction concerning the operation of the church of God. Earlier in the twelfth chapter Paul outlined the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, explaining that there were differences of administrations and operations, but that the Holy Spirit was the same originator of all and His manifestation was given to every man for the profit of the entire church.

In our lesson he compares the working of the church to the human body. Interestingly, his discourse is very similar to one given in earlier Greek writings. Titus Livius (Livy), in *The History of Rome, Book 2*, tells of Meneius Agrippa, an ambassador or consul “chosen by the patricians during the secession of the plebs in 494 BC to persuade the plebs to end their secession.” (*Plebs were common citizens in Rome, as opposed to the “upper class” patricians.*) Livy [writing 500 years later] says that “Menenius told the soldiers a fable about the parts of the human body and how each has its own purpose in the greater function of the body. The rest of the body thought the stomach was getting a free ride so the body decided to stop nourishing the stomach. Soon, the other parts became fatigued

and unable to function so they realized that the stomach did serve a purpose and they were nothing without it. In the story, the stomach represents the patrician class and the other body parts represent the plebs. Eventually, Livy says, an accord was reached between the patricians and the plebs, which included creating the office of tribune of the plebs” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrippa_Menenius_Lanatus_\(consul_503_BC\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agrippa_Menenius_Lanatus_(consul_503_BC))).

Paul may have drawn a parallel because he was writing to Greeks who would have evidently been familiar with Livy’s writings. However that may be, the study of the human body with its complex, interdependent systems can certainly give us many spiritual lessons, not the least of which are illustrations of the working of the members of His church.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Importance:* Which verses give instruction that there is no member less important than another? How may we apply this in our day?
2. *Organization:* From what part of the body are “orders” given for the rest of the body? How would this give insight into Colossians 2:19 describing some who were not “holding the Head?” Share the importance of following Christ, our Head.
3. *Schism:* What positive action must be taken to avoid this? (See verses 24-26.)

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

By reminding us of the operation of the human body, Paul lets us know how crucial it is for us to keep right attitudes toward one another, as members of Christ’s body. The legs and arms of a normal human body don’t really have a “mind of their own.” They just do what the brain triggers them to do. But we as individuals are different. We must voluntarily keep ourselves submitted unto our Head, Jesus Christ. By following Him and taking on His mind and His thoughts, we will learn to bestow the proper honor, covering or protection, provision or care for one another.

At the root of many problems among congregations or groups of God's people are attitudes that develop that communicate "I'm more important than you," or "You are not necessary." There is a danger of ignoring the hurts and needs of others when we are puffed up this way, so that we are not suffering with others as the Scripture instructs us. Before long there is a schism. We may attempt to shrug off our responsibility and say, "Oh, they're picking up a wrong spirit or doctrine," when if we would be honest, we would realize the very beginnings of schism were in our own lack of concern and proper honor of our brother or sister. It is time to earnestly pray about the responsibility we may have had in current struggles, that the Lord would show us how to bring about healing and restoration.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Let Us Be United

Should not the children of one Father
Live together here in harmony,
Bound by His love unto each other,
So that they ne'er can divided be?

Hear Jesus praying for His people:
"Sanctify them that they may be one."
Oh, let His prayer in us be answered,
And all His will in our hearts be done.

Sects and divisions shame our Savior,
Cause the world to scoff and disbelieve,
Send many precious souls to ruin,
Who might the grace of the Lord receive.

Let all contentions, names and parties
Be forsaken for the truth alone;
Let all the ransomed be united,
And no division among them known.

Chorus:

He hath broken down the middle wall of partition,
And in Him hath made us one:
He hath saved us from the sin of strife and division,
Through the precious cleansing blood of His dear Son.

—C. W. Naylor, #130, *Truth In Song*,
published by the Gospel Trumpet Company, 1907
—Submitted by Bro. Harlan Sorrell

OCTOBER 15, 2017

THE UNITY (ONENESS) OF BELIEVERS, PART TWO

One BRIDEGROOM, One BRIDE

Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the

church.

33 Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

Revelation 21:9b ...Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.

MEMORY VERSE: And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. —Revelation 21:2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God instituted marriage as an illustration of this great spiritual truth: there is one bridegroom, Christ; and one bride, the Church, which He purchased with His own blood. When we are redeemed by His blood we become part of that one bride and are united to Christ; by the same redemption we are also made members of one another.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ephesians 5:23 "Saviour": deliverer; preserver.

Ephesians 5:27 "Glorious": honorable; splendid; gorgeous.

"Figuratively equal to *free from sin*" (*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*).

Ephesians 5:29 "Nourish": nurture; bring up to maturity; feed.

"Cherish": nourish; keep warm; foster with tender care; comfort.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today's lesson draws from both the story of the creation of man in lesson one and Paul's comparison of the human body to the body of believers in lesson two. Here Paul presents the analogy of marriage, which typifies Christ and His bride.

The analogy is not the first in the Scriptures. Many times the prophets referred to the relationship between God and his people, Israel, as a marriage; in idolatrous times, Israel is presented as an adulteress wife or a harlot.

The relationship portrayed in the Song of Solomon points forward to the love between Christ and His bride.

Isaiah prophesied that in the times of the Messiah, the "land"—God's chosen inheritance of holy people—would be "married," and that He would rejoice over "her" as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride (Isaiah 62:4-5).

Hosea's message was of the devoted way God wooed his wayward people back to Him (Hosea 2:19-20).

In the New Testament, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as being the bridegroom who has the bride (John 3:29). Paul's writings allude to this same concept several times, as well.

In I Corinthians 15:45 Paul compares the first man, Adam, with Christ, Who is called "the last Adam." What a thrilling connection! Consider: from the first Adam's rib, the Lord God made Eve, "the mother of all living." Out of the last Adam's side came the church, His bride, purchased "with his own blood." To the Galatians Paul wrote that the church, the New Jerusalem (which John saw coming down from God out of heaven and called "The Lamb's wife"), is "the mother of us all." To Eve, Adam said, "This is now flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone." Of Jesus, Paul said, "We are members of His flesh and of His bones."

This important truth is integral to the doctrines concerning Biblical marriage, the church of God, and the unity of God's people.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Comparison:* Of what is marriage a type? Discuss the

different parts of the analogy.

2. *A Mystery*: Give your thoughts on *why* Paul calls this a mystery.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

My heart has been very thrilled and stirred by the importance God has placed on oneness. His desire was to have unity and fellowship with every living soul—a *vertical* relationship, if you will. God desired oneness, unity and fellowship between His children—a *horizontal* relationship—the result of oneness with Christ. The spiritual and physical relationship in a natural marriage, which were instituted to portray the relationship between Christ and the Church, were all present in God's design from the very beginning of time and were His crowning creation. That was the setting forth of a great PURPOSE and a great mystery unknown throughout many ages, which was fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ.

I'm thrilled because I'm glimpsing a beautiful vision, of both marital unity and Christian unity. I'm stirred because I see how Satan has sabotaged unity over and over. I see it as the goal, the possibility. Like the human body, it is fearfully and wonderfully planned and made. Fearful because it can be thwarted and hindered by sin and disobedience. Full of wonder because of the way the Scriptures, from beginning to end, fit together to present a complete, beautiful plan!

I am challenged to the quest and the possibilities. In marriage, how can we better experience true unity and present to the world a clear picture of God's plan? With my brothers and sisters in the whole scope of humanity, how can I better relate and enter into a greater bond of sympathy and compassion for them? How can I make life more about US and less about ME? In the body of Christ—those who, being redeemed by His blood, are baptized into one body by one Spirit—how may I experience greater and more perfect unity and harmony? I am seeking earnestly. Will you seek too?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Adam Clarke writes, "*We find that the authority of the man over the woman is founded on his love to her, and this love must be such as to lead him to risk his life for her. As the care of the family devolves on the wife, and the children must owe the chief direction of their minds and formation of their manners to the mother, she has need of all the assistance and support which her husband can give her; and, if she performs her duty well, she deserves the utmost of his love and affection.*

The husband is to love his wife, the wife to obey and venerate her husband; love and protection on the one hand, affectionate subjection and fidelity on the other. The husband should provide for his wife without encouraging profuseness; watch over her conduct without giving her vexation; keep her in subjection without making her a slave; love her without jealousy; oblige her without flattery; honour her without making her proud; and be hers entirely, without becoming either her footman or her slave. In short, they have equal rights and equal claims; but superior strength gives the man dominion, affection and subjection entitle the woman to love and protection. Without the woman, man is but half a human being; in union with the man, the woman finds her safety and perfection."

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

OCTOBER 22, 2017

THE UNITY (ONENESS) OF BELIEVERS, PART THREE

One Family

John 11:51b ...being high priest that year, he [Caiaphas] prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation;

52 And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall

believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Ephesians 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE: For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. —Ephesians 3:14-15

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus' purpose for taking on humanity and dying as a substitute for mankind was not only to save us from our sins but also to unite us into one family, making us, through Him, spiritual brothers and sisters, and taking away, by His death, the walls that separate us.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 11:51b “And being high priest that year, he prophesied...”: “The high priest was believed in ancient times to have the power of drawing from Urim and Thummim the Divine decisions as to future events (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21), and Caiaphas, as priest-prophet, may thus have conveyed an awful and sublime truth through base and evil dispositions” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

Ephesians 1:10 “Dispensation”: the “plan for the management of any sort of business: and here it means the dispensation of the Gospel, that plan by which God has provided salvation for a lost world; and according to which he intends to gather all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, into one Church under Jesus Christ, their head and governor” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Ephesians 2:13 “Ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh.” A reference to Isaiah 57:19, “I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is afar off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord.”

2:14 “For he is our peace”: He is our *peace offering*. Colossians 1:20 says He “made peace through the blood of His cross.” “The middle wall”: barrier. “Of partition”: hedge; fence. “There was a twofold wall of partition, one the inner wall, severing the Jewish people from entrance to the holy part of the temple where the priests officiated, the other the outer wall, separating the Gentile proselytes from access to the court of the Jews (compare Eze 44:7; Ac 21:28). Thus this twofold wall represented the Sinaitic law, which both severed all men, even the Jews, from access to God (through sin, which is the violation of the law), and also separated the Gentiles from the Jews. As the term ‘wall’ implies the strength of the partition, so ‘fence’ implies that it was easily removed by God when the due time came” (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*).

Ephesians 2:15 “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”: “Abolish” means *to render inoperative or useless*. Christ abolished the *letter* of the law, but established the *spirit* of it.

Ephesians 2:19 “Stranger”: guest; foreigner; alien. “Foreigner”: temporary dweller; sojourner. “In this chapter the Church of God is compared to a city, which, has a variety of privileges, rights, etc., founded on regular charters and grants. The Gentiles, having

believed in Christ, are all incorporated with the believing Jews in this holy city. Formerly, when any of them came to Jerusalem, being strangers, they had no kind of rights whatever; nor could they, as mere heathens, settle among them. Again, if any of them, convinced of the errors of the Gentiles, acknowledged the God of Israel, but did not receive circumcision, he might dwell in the land, but he had no right to the blessings of the covenant; such might be called sojourners—persons who have no property in the land, and may only rent a house for the time being” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

John, hearing the prophecy given by Caiaphas, expounded its meaning and no doubt connected it with Jesus’ earlier teaching about the Good Shepherd bringing “other sheep” into His “one fold” (John 10:16). John is also the only Gospel writer who includes Jesus’ prayer for the unity of His disciples (Chapter 17). This emphasis on unity is carried on further in his three epistles, as he teaches about fellowship and love of the brethren.

Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians compares the church of God to several different things: the human body, a marriage, a family or household, and a temple, or building. Each of these analogies completes the picture in our minds of God’s plan for oneness.

I wish I could convey the thrill that came with reading and studying for this lesson! I literally ran out of space trying to include all the word definitions that make these verses so meaningful. Let me challenge each of you to make this your own personal study throughout the next few weeks.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Household Member*: Share what this means to you.
2. *To Gather into One*: Explain the two-fold, complete purpose of Jesus’ sacrificial death.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Surely our hearts are moved with wonder and joy as we see Christ's purpose unfolding in this lesson! He not only came to save us but to *gather* us. To take us from being alienated and separated from Him and from each other to being household members in one home, children of one Father, brothers and sisters in one family, sheep of one fold!

Paul ends the second chapter of Ephesians with the idea of stones built together into one building. Peter also teaches this, calling us "lively stones" that are built into a "spiritual house" (I Peter 2:5). I love this concept, as I see it picked up also by John in the Revelation. Here we see the same elements—stones, walls, a foundation, a temple—also being combined with the analogy of the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and the Holy City, the New Jerusalem.

The essential element of this whole picture is the indwelling Spirit of God. Without that, there is no spiritual birth into one family; there are no living stones, no inhabited building or temple, no city of light. There is no marriage, no union, and there is no unity between fellow members. The law could not accomplish this blessedness; nor can religious expressions, dogma, or practices. It is the Spirit of God alone filling every believer that makes the glorious union of Christ and His bride, the true fellowship between God and man, and the blessed unity between brethren.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There is something inherently beautiful about the family—one cohesive unit where we learn the basic principles needed to navigate through life. We learn how to love, how to share, how to work with one another. We learn the dynamics of authority and discipline and cooperation. We experience joys and disappointments and the support and encouragement of those we love and those who love us.

Family is the foundation of our society and love is what holds it together. Every institution whether social or otherwise is a product of the family. Every person ever born, in some way or another, lives within the context of family life—related by blood, by marriage or

adoption.

But we are currently experiencing a ruthless attack on the family unit and a hideous redefining of the structure and norms of family life. Marriage, an institution of God, has been savagely redefined. The family, the moral compass of society, has been brutally restructured. But this does not change God's original plan or purpose. His plan has always been for the family of God to reach the families of men.

When the world grew so wicked that the only alternative was to destroy it, God used a family to reinstate his righteousness and reclaim proper worship. Today He uses the church family to promote his love and to show the world the beauty of oneness.

If the family unit is broken we will see the rippling effects of that brokenness throughout society. If the church—our spiritual family, is fractured, the catastrophic damage will ripple throughout the world and throughout the ages. It is imperative that we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. The world yearns for it. Christ died for it and we have a duty to live it out as an example to mankind.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

OCTOBER 29, 2017

BIBLICAL DIVISION

Matthew 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. (See also verse 21.)

36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (See also Luke 14:26-27.)

Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the

hearts of the simple.

II Corinthians 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. (See verses 4-16; also Isaiah 52:11.)

Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

II Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. (See also I Corinthians 5:11, I Timothy 6:3-5 and II Timothy 3:5)

I John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

MEMORY VERSE: And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. —Revelation 18:4

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Alongside Scriptural admonitions concerning the unity of the brethren are warnings that a division must be made between truth and error, clean and unclean, darkness and light; even between close family members when some have a mind to follow Christ and others do not.

WORD DEFINITIONS

II Thessalonians 3:6 “Disorderly”: Not in proper arrangement; irregular (morally); undisciplined. “Tradition”: instruction passed on from one generation to the next.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Making a separation between good and evil was not an unfamiliar thing to the new Jewish Christians. Clear back in Noah’s time people were known as either “sons of God” or “sons of men.” Abraham was called to leave his idolatrous family and nation and remove to another land. The Israelites were commanded to make

distinctions between clean and unclean in their diet, hygiene, marriages, and worship. They could not marry nor intermingle with the idol-worshipping people of Canaan; rather they were commanded to destroy them (Numbers 33 50-56; Deuteronomy 13).

In the tabernacle worship, the anointing oil which was poured on the high priest was described later by the Psalmist as a symbol of the precious unity of the brethren (Psalm 133). Yet in its very design and function it was kept pure and free from contaminants and prohibited from personal use or use on strangers (Exodus 30). A separation is implied.

In this lesson, Jesus informed His disciples that peace in the heart doesn't necessarily bring peace among people; even in the home the follower of Jesus may experience persecution and bitter division from loved ones who are "of this world." Paul's instructions to the saints at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Thessalonica were to mark and avoid those who cause division or bring offenses (they are not really serving Christ); to come out of unequal yokes or unions with unbelievers or idolaters, echoing the call given by the prophet Isaiah; to have no fellowship with those whose works were produced by spiritual darkness; and to withdraw from those whose lives were disorderly. John warned about false prophets and spirits that were anti-Christ, and the voice from heaven which he heard while the revelation was given, warned to flee from fallen, apostate religion—Babylon—and not be partakers of the sins there.

Throughout the Old Testament and continuing on into the New, God put a clear command to His people to keep a separation between righteousness and unrighteousness, clean and unclean, light and darkness, true worship and idolatry.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Foes in His Own Home:* Explain or give examples of what this means.
2. *The Right Attitude:* If a division must be made, describe the attitude one must have in keeping with Jesus' commands to love one another.
3. *The Balance:* By "withdraw" does the apostle mean simply to

avoid or break fellowship? How do we balance between warning, praying for, trying to win, and breaking fellowship?

4. *A Distinction:* Name the specific things which bring about a Biblical division. Over which things should there NOT be division? (Think about it! Cite Scriptures!)

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The one disclaimer in this series of lessons on unity is the solemn fact that there *are* Biblical reasons why two may not walk any longer together. It is a delicate balance, and while I do not wish to make it more difficult than it is, here are things to consider prayerfully:

God hates divorce, or the splitting up of the marital union. He hates the sowing of discord among brethren. But He also hates false doctrine, dishonesty, pride, and idolatry. When a soul would follow the Lord all the way and those with whom he or she is closely united either by family, marriage, or church affiliation make it their choice to closely fellowship with the idolatry of this world, doctrines of devils, apostate religion (Babylon), or lifestyles of pride or dishonesty, there will come a separation. Many times a choice has to be made to serve the Lord or sever the relationship. (Concerning an unbelieving spouse, the Bible is clear that if the unbeliever is pleased to stay married to the believer, the believing spouse must do his or her best to live, married, in such a way as to win the spouse to Christ.)

Many times the persons who are choosing a different way do the separating and walk away. But sometimes when there is clearly no spiritual agreement between individuals because one has chosen a hypocritical or dishonest lifestyle, or the doctrines of the group admit to sinful and/or unbiblical doctrines and practices, the one desiring to obey the Lord must not fellowship with such any longer.

Such a decision calls for much prayer, holy wisdom and discernment. Things should be done *in the right time and in the right way*. Precious souls are involved. Most of the time when children and young people are involved, a division results in their disillusionment and rebellion against anything religious altogether. There are great wounds and deep hurts that are rarely, if ever, healed. Certainly such a decision should be the absolute last resort. It should not be made

because of hurt feelings, wounded pride, personal agenda, ambition, personality conflicts, or minor differences of opinion.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

God established a division between species in the plant and animal world. These divisions are not to be broken down. Leviticus 19:19 says, “Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.” Planting corn and wheat together in the same field dissipates both crops. Planting together different kinds of the same seed may even result in useless fruit. “And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:25). God created every species to remain in its kind.

Greek mythology has depicted crossing different kinds of animals and men, which is an abomination to the Lord (See Leviticus 11:43-47 and Leviticus 18:23-30). God made the chromosomes of animals to vary in length, shape, and number from one kind of animal to another. Because each different kind of animal has its own unique number and arrangement of chromosomes, when animals mate their chromosomes split apart and must line up and match up with each other before they can combine to form a fertilized egg! It’s like God put a certain combination lock on each kind of animal to keep them in their distinct kind. What great order and clarity our God put into His creation! He knew beforehand what man in his depraved state would try to do. God’s requirements for reproduction make it a perversion for man to mix what God created to be separate.

In Deuteronomy 22:11 it speaks of the separation of divers kind of fibers. “Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts.” Think about having a coat one-half wool and one-half linen. What would happen when it got wet? Linen is made from fibers of flax plants; it is strong and cool, and it shrinks very little. Wool is durable and warm, but wool shrinks to roughly half of its original size. Wool fibers are 1.5 to 2 inches long; linen fibers are 6 to 40 inches long. Because

only fibers of similar lengths can successfully be spun together, one cannot spin wool and linen together into a durable thread. Blending the two together would result in a fabric that would literally tear itself apart when washed and dried.

God has given us counsel concerning separation from unbelievers. “Make no covenant with the inhabitants of the land” (Exodus 34:12-16). “Separate the precious from the vile” (Jeremiah 15:19). “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (II Corinthians 6:14). I Peter 2:9 tells us we are a peculiar people chosen by God and not to be mixed with the world. Read Ephesians 5:6-17. We were in darkness but are now the children of light.

—Bro. James Bell

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

RESPECT OF PERSONS

James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (See also Jude 16.)

2 For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

MEMORY VERSE: But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. —James 3:17

CENTRAL THOUGHT: One of the main hindrances to unity is an attitude of respect of persons. Applying the truths of brotherhood and Christian oneness will set us free from this common human tendency and bring about the equality among brethren that allows for the blessed and holy unity of the Spirit.

WORD DEFINITIONS

James 2:1 “Respect of persons”: partiality; personal favoritism. “The fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*). (See also word definition for Acts 10:34 on page 3.)

James 2:2 “A man with a gold ring”: “Those who valued themselves upon the richness and luxury of their dress, were accustomed to deck their fingers with a considerable number of costly and valuable rings, frequently wearing several upon one finger” (*Benson Commentary*). “Vile raiment”: sordid or dirty clothing.

James 2:3 “Ye have respect”: look on with favor; give special regard or special attention. “Footstool”: to subject; reduce under one’s power; place under one’s dominion.

James 2:4 “Partial”: to separate; make a distinction;

discriminate. “Judges of evil thoughts”: evil-thinking judges.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The law of Moses contained several commands concerning respect of persons; some of them specific to matters of judging. Judges were not to honor the person of the mighty (Leviticus 19:15), and in the case of the captains who aided Moses in deciding cases between brethren, they were to listen to the “small as well as the great” (Deuteronomy 1:17).

Job, when speaking to his friends, admonished that God would reprove those who secretly had respect of persons in their hearts (Job 13:10). This lets us know that outwardly we may feel societal pressure to stand for “equal rights,” but within still have preferential attitudes, disdain for those we feel are “less than,” and desires to curry favor with those we feel have more importance.

In the book of Malachi, the priests and Levites of that time were reprov'd by the Lord for many things; for corrupting the law and causing people to stumble, for profaning the covenant, and for being partial in the way they handled the law (Malachi 2:9).

The Jews, then, were familiar with God’s laws concerning equal treatment of brethren. But with the establishing of His Church and the bringing in of the Gentiles, there were many hurdles as different groups of people were now brothers and sisters in Christ and members together of the same body. Paul, writing to Timothy about the proper treatment of young and older men and women, church elders, and widows, gave him a charge to honor and serve them “without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality” (I Timothy 5:21). Partiality: “It means literally the ‘inclination’ of the scales to one side or the other, and hence a ‘bias’ of the mind to one party or the other. The balance of justice in the hands of Timothy was to be equal” (*Pulpit Commentary*).

The Scriptures in our lesson were given by James, and this book is considered universal, not written to any specific congregation or city, but to believers everywhere. James does not refer to himself as being an apostle, but merely calls himself a “servant of God.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Calling It What It Is*: James said respect of persons is _____.
2. *All Are Equal*: Is any race, color, nationality, ethnicity, or economic status more important in God's sight than another? Are any of them considered "less than" in His sight? What should be our response?
3. *To-Do List*: If you were the teacher of this lesson, what "homework" might you prescribe?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Preferential treatment of others for reasons of ethnic origin, wealth or social status has been a problem in every generation.

But this is our time; this is our day. We cannot fix the problems and mistakes of the past. We can, however, serve *our* generation. We can look deep into our own behaviors: our thoughts, motives, mental habits, traditions. Do we carry deep-seated resentment toward other groups of people? Do we prefer as friends those of our own color, social status, congregation or age group? How do we feel when someone from "another group" is given a place of honor, responsibility or power? Are we "surprised" when people we have inwardly considered somewhat "beneath us"—be honest!—turn out to be articulate, responsible, refined or truly spiritual? If certain people, groups or situations make us uncomfortable, have we explored the reasons why? Do we realize that groups of people right around us are treated unjustly or unfairly, yet remain silent and content to allow it to happen? What is our responsibility as saints of God as we consider that 11 a. m. Sunday morning is known as the most segregated hour in America? Have we ever prayed—earnestly prayed—or fasted about this situation? How willing are we to be a voice, a friend, a welcoming host, a comfortable guest, a true brother or sister to all?

These are questions for us all to consider. Lord, am I truly obeying the scriptures in our lesson today? Do I truly have a heart and spirit pure and free from respect of persons?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Don't you know that you are my favorite *oldest* son?" My mother has often used this remark with me, both as a child and even in adulthood, particularly when asking me to perform some favor. Through the years, I've heard her use a modified version with my other six siblings, being careful not to show favoritism to any of us, as both my parents always strove to be sensitive to exhibitions of partiality among their children. In fact, they did their best to establish that each of us was special and favored by assigning each one of us a day of the week on which we were given a special seat at the dinner table, received a special treat, and got to pray next to "Daddy and Mommy" during devotion. How each one of us cherished our special day, and the thought of begrudging each other the opportunity to feel loved and wanted never occurred to us.

However, throughout history, partiality has been a destructive force in tearing apart families, as well as bringing division among God's people. It is also something that isn't so easy to root out and is easily passed from generation to generation. Think of how the favoritism shown by Abraham to Isaac, who was the son of promise, appears to have led to Isaac favoring Esau over Jacob, who was less rugged and manly, while Rebecca favored Jacob in return. This in turn may have caused Jacob to love Joseph, the oldest son of his favorite wife, Rachel, above all his other many children, leading to generations of heartache and ruin, the affects of which are still evident in the world to this day.

It is good to know that God does not respect any person above another. No matter what our physical appearance, our intellect, our skin color, our gender, our family heritage, our age, or any other traits that distinctly identify us, our Creator loves and cares for each of us, and we are all special to Him!

Because of this, just as the Pharisee received no justification for commending himself over the Publican, the rank sinner who wasn't anything like him, God will hold accountable those who consider themselves superior to others around them and don't treat all of God's creation with love and respect.

—Bro. Fari Matthews

NOVEMBER 12, 2017

SUPERIORITY

Deuteronomy 7:6 For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

7 The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people:

8 But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

I Chronicles 29:14 But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. (See also verses 4-8.)

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

I Corinthians 4:6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (See also I Corinthians 3:1-8.)

I Corinthians 8:2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

Galatians 6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

MEMORY VERSE: Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. —Galatians 5:26

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We are loved as God’s cherished treasure, not because we are superior, but because God is love, and in His plan and purpose has chosen us in love. Therefore we ought not to think more highly—nor lower—of ourselves than we ought to think, but consider the reality before God, that we are all equal in His sight and everything we have comes from Him. Because we are secure in God’s love, we are then free to prefer others over ourselves without feeling threatened.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Deuteronomy 7:6 “Special people”: one’s own treasured possession; valued property; from a root meaning *to closely shut up*. Same word as “jewels” in Malachi 3:17.

Deuteronomy 7:7 “Fewest”: little.

Romans 12:3 “Think soberly”: Be minded unto sober-mindedness; to have the thoughts and feelings habitually turned in a certain direction; to keep sobriety of mind constantly in view as the object or ideal towards which all the thoughts and feelings converge” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). “But as we must not be proud of our talents, so we must take heed lest, under a pretence of humility and self-denial, we are slothful in laying out ourselves for the good of others. We must not say, I am nothing, therefore I will sit still, and do nothing; but, I am nothing in myself, and therefore I will lay out myself to the utmost, in the strength of the grace of Christ. Whatever our gifts or situations may be, let us try to employ ourselves humbly, diligently, cheerfully, and in simplicity; not seeking our own credit or profit, but the good of many, for this world and that which is to come” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*).

Romans 12:16 “Condescend”: to allow oneself to be carried away with; experience with others the force of that which carries away; yield or submit to lowly things, conditions and employments.

“Be content with mean and low things in life, and disdain not to take notice of and converse with, men in a low condition, whether in things temporal or spiritual; who may be poor in this world, be very ignorant and illiterate, as to general knowledge and learning; be men of mean parts and abilities, of very small gifts, and be weak in faith and experience; condescend to their weaknesses, bear their infirmities, and become all things to them for their good, and God's glory: consider the apostle is writing to citizens of Rome, who might be tempted to look upon themselves above others, and to look disdainfully upon others, as [Roman] citizens too often do on country people, as if they were below them, as persons of low life to them” (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

Philippians 2:3 “Strife”: rivalry; ambition. “Vainglory”: empty, cheap pride; groundless self-esteem.

Galatians 5:26 “Vain glory” (The adjective form—vain glorious): driven by delusions of personal grandeur.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Recalling that many of the struggles of the early church had to do with the Jewish Christians receiving as *brethren* the Gentile converts, having come from a background of viewing them as “dogs,” or “swine,” and esteeming themselves as set-apart and treasured jewels in God’s sight, let us review the Scriptures where God had given them such distinction. We find that God reminded them constantly that it had nothing to do with them; rather, it was His love and Divine purpose and plan to use them as *vesse/s* to reach all people in uttermost parts of the world and draw them to Him. They weren’t special, the best, the greatest number, the most righteous; in fact, they were stubborn, self-willed, and ungrateful for their blessings. They despised the land they had been given. They tossed His laws behind their backs.

Many of Jesus’ parables dealt with their attitudes of superiority. Paul’s writings to the different congregations had much to do with the natural, human tendency toward self-aggrandizement and partisanship. In fact, at the root of apostasy was the lifting up of those who were in places of authority; esteeming position, prestige and power above humility and the reproach of the cross. It is the

very same struggle we face today.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Special Treasure:* Why were the Israelites considered thus?
2. *The Promise to Their Fathers:* What was that oath? (Hint: Abraham)
3. *Differences:* Are there reasons to feel superior or inferior to another?
4. *Dangers:* Summarize the main spiritual pitfalls that endangered the early church and the church today.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There is a close link between the respect of persons studied in last week's lesson and the superiority attitude in our lesson today. One is definitely motivated by the other. The answer to the problem is the humility and self-denial Jesus so often taught His disciples, and the source for that is the cross—dying with Him, laying down ourselves, giving our lives for the brethren. Another term describing that process is “ego-slaying.” It takes that to be in the place for the Holy Spirit to fill our lives. “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

Are we willing to totally lay down our lives—our ambitions, preferences, positions, hopes, dreams, schemes, reputations—for one another? Do we gladly prefer one another—“outdo one another” in showing honor one to another; do we truly esteem the other better than ourselves? Oh, how beautiful is mutual honor when observed in a family, and especially God's family!

We are called to make this our rule of living wherever we live in society. In the office, on the worksite, on the bus, in the school, in houses of government, in the courtroom, on social media, in our friendships, neighborhoods—even in traffic going down the highway. Yield. Put others first. Genuinely put yourself in another's place, to feel how he feels, to walk where he has walked, to experience what he has experienced, before ever a judgment is made concerning him. This is how Christ loved. He *became* us—put Himself in our place; THEN He was exalted to be Lord and Judge of all. Let us follow Him!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The events that took place at the White Supremacist rally at Charlottesville, Virginia in August of this year truly demonstrated the depravity of carnal, unregenerate and unsanctified human hearts. The root of all such behavior is pride and selfishness. “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:14-17).

Paul tells us in Acts 17:26 that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” The fact is, all the variations of skin color, hair texture and color, stature and size, personality traits, etc., have cropped out from Noah’s family—his three sons and their wives—who escaped the destruction of the great flood that destroyed the old world. This should tell us that God loves “variety.” “Who maketh thee to differ from another?” And why should any one of us “be puffed up for one against another?”

Let us remember that when dealing with any fellow human being we are dealing with a unique piece of God’s creation. We should never think for a moment that we are superior to or better than them. Instead, let us think about this: “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.” (1 Pet. 1:24). Our bodies are all headed for the grave! After your body has laid there awhile, how much better looking do you think you will be than the others in the cemetery?

“’Tis meet that the creature dependent
For even the breath that we draw,
Should feel very grateful, and humbly
Serve God in His beautiful law.
’Tis low, ’tis low, low down at His feet we bow;
’Tis low, ’tis low, ’tis low at His feet we bow.”

—D. S. Warner, verse 2 and chorus of #92 in *Echoes From Heaven*
—Bro. Harlan Sorrell

NOVEMBER 19, 2017

ENVY

The Philistines Envied Isaac

Genesis 26:12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him.

13 And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great:

14 For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him.

15 For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth.

16 And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we.

Joseph's Brethren Envied Him

Genesis 37:3 Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

Saul Envied David

1 Samuel 18:6 And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick.

7 And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

8 And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?

9 And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.

MEMORY VERSE: But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. For where

envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

—James 3:14, 16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The lessons from the lives of Isaac, Joseph and Saul reveal that envy brings strife and division between close friends and brothers.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 26:12 “An hundredfold”: A hundred measures of barley for every measure he sowed; an exceptional return—the usual rate in Palestine was thirty to a hundred-fold.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In Genesis we learn that Isaac’s father Abraham had enjoyed good relationships with the Philistines among whom he sojourned. The king, Abimelech, was actually a God-fearing man of integrity. He and his chief captain entered into a covenant with Abraham that neither of them would harm or deal falsely with the other. Sadly, however, when Abraham’s son Isaac began to prosper greatly, we read that the Philistines “envied” him. This began a long, tempestuous, warring relationship between the Israelites and the Philistines. Historically, it seems they spent all their time and resources trying to get the best of the Israelites. In recent archaeological finds there are hints as to how much their strife and rivalry affected their lives. While they had a few war champions of great height, many of their remains show signs of malnourishment and stunted growth. They produced and consumed great amounts of fermented beverages .

<http://www.foxnews.com/science/2016/12/21/contents-first-discovered-philistine-cemetery-revealed.html>)

Both Zephaniah and Zechariah later prophesied of their complete annihilation, which was fulfilled around the 5th century BC. While reading these verses and learning of the discoveries, this verse came to my mind: “Envy [is] the rottenness of the bones” (Proverbs 14:30). What a grim reminder!

There are also great lessons to be learned from the story of Jacob’s sons. Because he unwisely favored Joseph, the older sons

plotted to kill him, then changed their minds and sold him into Egypt, a move that was surely turned into good by God, who was with Joseph and used him as an instrument to save the world from starvation in the time of famine. Envy between brothers certainly had tragic consequences in this story, until God moved upon them and through Joseph's forgiveness and reconciliation, things ended well.

A tragic end to King Saul was also the result of envy that he allowed to grow in his heart toward young David, who had courageously faced the giant and wrought a great deliverance for Israel. Saul, also angry because God had chosen David to be Israel's next king, tried to kill David many times, was taken over by an evil spirit, and died a gruesome death, forsaken by God.

The memory verse from James reminds the New Testament church that envy and strife brings confusion and division, in contrast to godly wisdom, which is pure, peaceable and gentle.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Trouble's Beginnings:* What seems to be the reason for years of strife between the Philistines and the Israelites?
2. *Triumph:* What brought an end to the strife between Joseph and his brethren?
3. *Tragic Consequences:* What was the end result of Saul's envy?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Envy seems to follow closely behind attitudes of superiority and respect of persons. It is the carnal response to being made to feel "less than" and must be dealt with—crucified. Envy will destroy relationships if allowed to remain. If someone else has humbled themselves and is experiencing the grace of God working in his or her life, the carnal reaction of envy is to criticize or belittle the good things that are being manifested. Financial blessings in one's life can be a secret—or not so secret—source of envy in another. If God has placed an individual in a place of responsibility that may have been

the secret ambition of someone else, envy in the heart will resent that one and bring opposition. It may be subtle; it may be quite open, but it's still ugly.

Humility is truly the end of strife; both sides—the one who has been put in a position of leadership and the one who feels “less than”—need the grace of humility to enjoy the peaceful unity God intended to be in His church. This humility can only come through the Holy Spirit of God filling, refining, purging of all carnality and self-interest. How we need to be filled with the Spirit! If the Word given in this lesson has spoken to our hearts and revealed a need, let us diligently, earnestly make a full consecration and cry for His power!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

We have been richly blessed in so many different ways. It hardly seems possible that we would be tempted to be envious, but we see it on every side. It seems to be at the bottom of almost every crime committed: drug dealing, gambling, and murder. Envy also plays a role in jealousy, contention, discontentment, and greed. It has been personified as a green-eyed monster.

I remember listening to a lesson in our children's library that dealt with envy. It gave a good solution called T.T.Y.O. Tend To Your Own. If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, then water and fertilize the grass on your side of the fence. A cup of contentment goes a long way towards eliminating this menacing foe. Take time to assess the blessings the Lord has given you.

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

NOVEMBER 26, 2017

EVIL SPEAKING

Leviticus 19:16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am the Lord.

Psalm 15:1 Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

3 He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.

Proverbs 10:18 He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a fool.

Proverbs 11:9 An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbor: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

13 A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

Proverbs 16:28 A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

Proverbs 26:20 Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.

22 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

James 4:11a Speak not evil one of another, brethren.

MEMORY VERSE: If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. —James 1:26

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Tale-bearing, slander, grievous and harsh words not only destroy souls and bring about strife between the brethren, but are reprov'd by the Lord, not allowed in His tabernacle (church), and are the mark of a hypocrite, whose religion is vain.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Leviticus 19:16 "Go up and down as a talebearer": This refers to a peddler who goes around selling his wares. A scandal-monger; informer; slanderer. "Stand against the blood of thy neighbor": "Either, to put his life in danger by standing up as his accuser

(compare Matthew 26:60); or, to stand by idly when thy neighbor's life is in danger" (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*).

Psalm 15:3 "Backbiteth": To go about on foot, as a spy, or to circulate unfavorable reports about others and privately, secretly behind their backs destroy their credit or reputation. "Reproach": "The Hebrew word has a striking derivation. Properly, the *stripping of the trees of autumn fruit*; so, stripping honour and reputation from a person" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*). "Does not raise any scandalous report on him himself, nor will he bear to hear one from another, much less will he spread one; nor will he suffer one to lie upon his neighbour, but will do all he can to vindicate him, and clear his character" (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*). "Nor doeth evil": any hurt or injury. "Neighbour": The word *neighbor* in this part of the verse refers to a close friend or companion. The second *neighbor* refers to someone who resides near you. The scriptures frequently signify "every man," even strangers or heathen, by the use of this word.

Proverbs 10:18 "He that hideth hatred": Someone "who pretends to be a friend and outwardly behaves as one, but inwardly nourishes and cherishes hatred in his heart, which he covers and conceals, till he has proper opportunity of showing it" (*Gill's*), as Judas Iscariot did to Jesus.

Proverbs 15:1 "Grievous": painful toil, hurt, or sorrow. This word comes from a word picturing an earthen vessel or idol, which was fashioned, then broken or shattered.

Ephesians 4:29 "Corrupt communication": rotten; useless; worthless; depraved thoughts expressed in words or speech.

Ephesians 4:31 "Clamour": loud cry; shriek; scream.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It is clear from these scriptures that the tongue is the instrument satan uses to divide brethren and destroy precious souls. It holds the power of death and life. A great emphasis is placed on the evils of tale-bearing. There is also much mentioned about flattery. Proper balance is needed: on one hand, we are not to gloss over evil with flattery, but to give proper reproof when it is needed. On the other, we are not to spread abroad our brother's faults and failings, but

cover them with charity.

Other scriptures inform us that the tongue can be a wellspring of wisdom; a tree of life, righteousness and health. A wise person's words are gracious, spoken in season, fitly spoken, forcible, seasoned with salt and edifying. Jesus gave us the solemn warning that our words will either justify or condemn us in the day of judgment. We will give an account for every idle word, He says, for our words reveal the abundance, or what overflows out of our hearts.

James mentions much about the tongue, especially in the third chapter. He reminds us that an unbridled tongue makes our profession of religion ENTIRELY VAIN! What a solemn warning!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Entrance Denied:* Where am I not allowed if I am a tale-bearer or a backbiter?
2. *Call It What It Is:* If I slander or destroy another with my words, I am called a _____ and a _____.
3. *No-no's:* List the kinds of communication forbidden by the scriptures.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Words that sow strife and separate brethren; grievous words that shatter hearts and cause pain and anger; screams of impatience and anger; insincere flattery that hides malicious backbiting; words that strip another of his reputation or lay his weaknesses bare; harsh words that judge or condemn—these all overflow from hearts full of superiority, pride, malice, envy, and dishonesty. The Bible is clear: people who do these things may be *among* the people of God, but they are not *in* the body. They are not part of God's church—His tabernacle; His holy hill. They are noxious weeds growing in the field of the world, evil trees that are not His planting. They are professors of a vain religion.

Jesus gave the answer: an axe laid at the root of the tree. Genuine repentance and His Holy Spirit to thoroughly purge His threshing floor of ungodly weeds and chaff. If we profess salvation and really want to do God's will, but have found ourselves coming

short in this area, God is merciful to give us space to repent. Let us seek Him earnestly to cleanse our hearts and fill us with His Spirit so the abundance of our hearts—and the words from our mouths—would only be holiness and peace.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I am intrigued by how often people get themselves into trouble by the things they say in a forum such as Twitter or Facebook. We consistently hear of those who have had to apologize or retract statements they've made simply because they did not understand the effect their words would have on those who would consume them. Speaking evil is not simply about the words spoken but also the context in which they are spoken, the timing as well as the motivation.

What is said may appear innocent enough but some words can have meaning that goes far beyond their dictionary definition. They can have attached to them, a history that ignites controversy and brings pain to its targeted audience. There can be innuendos and biases tucked surreptitiously into casual phrases. So not only must we refrain from speaking evil but we must shun even the appearance of doing so.

We must also understand that our words are not independent of our thoughts and our thoughts are not independent of our actions. If we speak evil of our fellow man or even think evil of them, we will act accordingly. And no amount of self-restraint can prevent our true feelings from eventually seeping into our actions though it may be subtle and virtually imperceptible.

As Christians, our words must be fitly spoken, both in private as well as in public. Now more than ever we need to show forth the love of Christ to our fellow men, not speak evil of them. We must ask the Lord to search our lives, our ideas and philosophies. We must seek the Lord to purge and purify our hearts and align our thoughts to that of the Holy Spirit.

If we can't say something nice about our fellow man, it is indeed in our best interest to not say anything at all. For the scripture tells us that by our words we shall be justified and by our words we shall be condemned.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

DECEMBER 3, 2017

HURTS AND OFFENSES

Matthew 18:7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

Mark 9:42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. (Also verses 15-17.)

21 It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

I Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

MEMORY VERSE: We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. —Romans 15:1-2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: We need to live with the thought in mind that our words and actions influence and affect others, and exercise utmost care that we do not hurt or offend any of our brethren for whom Jesus died.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 18:7 “Offences” (spelled *offenses* in modern English): a stick or bait (trigger) for a trap; a snare; a stumbling block; also, any person or thing by which one is drawn into error or sin. When applied to Christ in the Scripture, it means the native rock which rises up through the earth, causing the traveler to trip; hence, He was referred to as the stone of stumbling or the rock of offense.

Mark 9:43 “If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed...”: “Not that there will be any such thing, as upon the resurrection, going into heaven without a limb; for the words are to be understood, not literally, but figuratively; and the sense is, it is better to part with every thing here, that is detrimental to a man's doing, or enjoying, what is spiritually good, and enter into eternal life; ‘Than having two hands, to go into hell’: Than by enjoying such persons and things, agreeable to the flesh, to the ruin of the soul, and be cast into hell” (*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

I Corinthians 10:33 and Romans 15:1-2 “Please”: from a primitive root meaning *to fit together*; to serve; to win someone's favor.

LESSON BACKGROUND

When I began studying the verses for this subject, I found the word *offense* to mean several different things in Scripture. There is the idea of Jesus being a stumbling block to the Jews, and therefore His cross as well, becoming an object at which they were offended. He also spoke of sufferings and persecutions which arise because of the Word offending souls who were excited about the Christian life at first, but not having the depth of consecration and perseverance to withstand hardships, give up their profession of faith.

Then there is the discussion concerning the strict Jews and how they were being offended by the liberty which the new Gentile Christians displayed in what they could eat or drink. It seems the Jewish Christians, being brought up not eating the marketplace meat which may or may not have been dedicated to idol worship, had a problem with the Gentiles, who, knowing their old idols didn't mean

a thing, weren't bothered by scruples concerning meat sold down at the market. The Jewish Christians, stumbling at this "offense," were tempted to give up their belief in Jesus altogether, and go back to their old religion. The Gentiles were tempted to despise those old judging Jews and go overboard displaying their "liberty." This of course was a hindrance to the sweet unity Christ wanted them to have.

I think Jesus looked ahead and realized the hurdles that would face the new church. His admonition called for carefulness in everyone; care lest the thing you were allowing made you indulge in fleshly living and doom your soul, and care lest you caused someone else to stumble and lose his soul. His pronounced "woe" lets us know the seriousness here. Paul continues dealing with this issue, and stresses the *motive* we should have in all our dealings with our brother or sister—that of their spiritual profit. Whatever we eat or drink or do, we should do it with the glory of God and the desire not to offend or make another weak. This pure motive for others' salvation and edification will go a long way in maintaining unity.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Offenses Will Come*: Name some of the things which cause souls to become offended.
2. *Cut It Off*: What is Jesus's real meaning here?
3. *Meat or Drink*: Is he saying outward things are not important at all? What is he stressing?
4. *No Offense*: What attitude will keep us from offending others? What attitude will keep US from being offended?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Jesus cried "Woe," as an exclamation of sorrow that, with sinful men being what they are, offenses and temptations to sin would be inevitable. However, no one is without a choice. If we then *choose* to cause others to stumble, then a woe is pronounced upon *us*!

So we are presented with a choice as to how we deal with the hardships and offenses presented by the cross of Christ, which are

going to come because we are no longer part of this world nor protected by it as its own. We don't belong, and we don't fit, and we need to accept that and rejoice in it. "Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me," Jesus said. And the Psalmist rejoiced, "Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them."

We also need to accept the fact that we'll experience some trials and tests from our brothers or sisters in Christ. Getting along in a big family will have its adjustments. Hurts. Disappointments. Misunderstandings. I've found this to be true: if I live on the *defense* (very touchy about my rights, opinions, choices— whatever), I'm just open prey for others to *offend* me. But if I give others space to *be themselves*, express themselves, deal with God themselves; while at the same time releasing *myself* to God, for Him to deal with *me*, being assured that He loves me, I am set free from constantly being offended.

Our task then is to make sure we live purely before God and charitably toward our brothers and sisters. It is possible to live to please God and at the same time live with the motive and attitude to please our brethren, not because we're in bondage to them, but because we have a genuine care for their eternal souls.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Our lesson is dealing with things that are common to mankind— hurts and offenses. Reading in Ezekiel 47, a chapter portraying the gospel, we see that wherever it reached it brought healing, light and life. Notice that in verse 12 the trees growing on the banks of the river had fruit on them and it was never consumed. The fruit was for meat (spiritual nourishment) and the leaves were for medicine (for bruises and sores, the margin in my Bible says). Those bruises and sores were meant to be bound up and healed.

All hurts and offenses need the healing balm of the gospel applied to them. Old wounds with germs and corruption in them carry an odor that doesn't bring glory and honor to God. Passing under the cleansing fountain purges out all infection down to the root. Thank the Lord for the fountain!

I would like for every reader to look closely at the words of the song, "Does Jesus Care?"

“Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares distress, and the way grows weary and
long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades does He care enough to be
near?

Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong;
When for my deep grief I find no relief, tho' my tears flow all the night long?

Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye" to the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to Him? Does He see?

Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares! His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares.”

—Bro. James Bell

DECEMBER 10, 2017

FORGIVENESS

Genesis 50:15 And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

16 And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,

17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

18 And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.

19 And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

21 Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

Matthew 18:21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Mark 11:25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

MEMORY VERSE: Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord. —Leviticus 19:18

CENTRAL THOUGHT: By specific commands and clear examples we are taught by the Word to forgive from the heart those who have wronged us if we desire to be forgiven by God for our failures. A forgiving heart is essential for living in unity.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 50:19 “Am I in the place of God?”: Two meanings are possible. (1) Am I to act as judge and punish you, or take vengeance upon you? Or (2) as an affirmative—I am now in God’s place, with His bounty to distribute. I will nourish you.

Matthew 18:21, Mark 11:25, Luke 17:3 “Forgive”: to send away; release; discharge.

Ephesians 4:32 “Forgiving”: exercising grace; freely showing favor; willingly or graciously bestowing pardon.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There just doesn’t seem to be a more fitting example for this lesson than the precious scene of Joseph freely and graciously forgiving his brothers. They had envied and hated him, plotted to kill him, sold him into slavery, and then lived a lie before their broken-hearted father for years. God gave Joseph the ability to see beyond his own hurt and understand the purpose of God in it all. He also gave him the ability to forget the pain and use the experience to grow and be fruitful as a person. If we could grasp this kind of faith, how valuable it would be to us!

Our next verses tell of Peter when he so generously (he thought) suggested to the Lord that forgiving seven times in a day would be a good thing. Jesus blew him away by His answer! He illustrated the pettiness of our little grievances by comparing them to the enormous debt of our sins that was forgiven by God. What a revelation of His kind, loving heart! He ends with a warning of the seriousness of not forgiving from the heart.

We also have an admonition recorded by Mark at the end of a lesson given by Jesus about faith and prayer. I believe this shows that great faith and availing prayer are closely connected with keeping the heart free from grudges and full of forgiveness.

Luke gives a lesson on unlimited forgiveness, after which the disciples, realizing the depth of compassion needed to fulfil Christ’s standard, exclaimed to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

Paul continues with admonitions for the church to maintain a forgiving attitude one toward another. Our memory verse reminds

us of the commandment revealing the desires of God’s heart for His people to love one another. As we see the Divine standard—the forgiveness of Christ—we must say with the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith!”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Evidences of Forgiveness:* What did Joseph do and say that showed his forgiving heart?
2. *Remember:* Share the story in Matthew 18 which demonstrates the depth of God’s forgiveness.
3. *The Divine Standard:* What is the standard for our forgiveness?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

As Jesus said, it is impossible that hurts, temptations, and occasions of stumbling won’t be placed in our way. Our lesson today teaches us how we need to deal with them—with a depth of compassion like Christ’s and an expansion of our faith in God. Joseph’s example and that of others who had grievous hurts heaped upon them—David, Jesus, Stephen—challenges me.

There can be no question as to what God requires. Consider the things we as people stumble over; the hurts that get us down, the grudges that we hold, the vengeance we contemplate. If we could just take hold of the awful reality of just what God’s vengeance will mean to precious souls; of the enormity of our debt that God so freely released; of the ability God can give us to forgive and forget—then we could let go of our bitterness and seek to nourish and care for the very ones who brought us pain.

The years of abuse or the character of the abuser may not allow us to be reconciled or to trust again, or to be close enough to give that kind of service. But we can pray. We can beg God for mercy for their souls. We can be set free to truly love.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Many are aware of the story of Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Christian who along with her family helped many escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. She was later caught and imprisoned at a concentration camp in Germany where thousands died, including her sister. Corrie herself was miraculously released due to a clerical error a week or so before her group was sent to the gas chambers. After the war she returned to Germany and recounted the following event in her book, *Tramp for the Lord*:

"That place was Ravensbruck, and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard—one of the most cruel guards.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!' And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying. 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me. 'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,'—again the hand came out—'will you forgive me?'

And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again been forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place. Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? It could have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart.

But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness

is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus, help me!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.' And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust out my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!' For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then. But even then, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit."

—Bro. Fari Matthews

DECEMBER 17, 2017

RECONCILIATION AND RESTORATION

Proverbs 18:19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Matthew 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Matthew 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an

heathen man and a publican.

MEMORY VERSE: Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. —Galatians 6:1-2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Bible instructs us what we should do if we have offended someone, if someone has sinned against us, or if one of the brethren has been overtaken in a fault. Reconciliation and restoration are the goals for which we should strive if at all possible.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 18:19 “Offended”: from a root meaning to break away; to transgress, rebel, offend. There is also another meaning given to the verse by the Septuagint and other translations: “A brother assisted by a brother, is like a fortified city; and their decisions are like the bars of a city.” Either meaning presents a true statement about relationships in a family or in God’s family.

Matthew 5:22 “Raca”: empty-headed; stupid; foolish. An expression of contempt. “Thou fool”: dull; stupid; foolish; brainless. The Greek word is the root for the English word “moron.”

Matthew 5:23 “Ought”: a certain thing.

Matthew 5:24 “Reconciled”: *I change*; end needless hostility; exchange enmity for friendship. “By our brother, here, we are to understand any person...for we are all made of one blood. Raca, is a scornful word and comes from pride: Thou fool, is a spiteful word, and comes from hatred. Malicious slanders and censures are poison that kills secretly and slowly. Christ told them that how light soever they made of these sins, they would certainly be called into judgment for them. We ought carefully to preserve Christian love and peace with all our brethren; and if at any time there is a quarrel, we should confess our fault, humble ourselves to our brother, making or offering satisfaction for wrong done in word or deed: and we should do this quickly; because, till this is done, we are unfit for communion with God in holy ordinances. And when we are preparing for any religious exercises, it is good for us to make that an occasion of serious reflection and self-examination!” (*Matthew*

Henry's Commentary).

Matthew 18:17 "A heathen and a publican": a Gentile (pagan) and a tax collector.

Galatians 6:1 "Overtaken": caught; taken by surprise. "Fault": false step; trespass; lapse or deviation from truth; an error; "slip-up"; wrongdoing that can be relatively unconscious. (Some commentators think this means "caught in the act" of transgression, while others contend for a meaning of *non-deliberate trespass*.)

"Restore": an allusion to the setting of a broken bone or a limb out of place or of the disciples mending their nets. "Meekness": gentleness; kindness; properly, temperate; displaying the right blend of force and reserve; avoiding unnecessary harshness, yet without compromising or being too slow to use necessary force.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The early morning church faced all kinds of people problems. Sorcerers, hypocrites (false brethren), heretics (false prophets), law-spirited Jews, hundreds of former idolaters who were ignorant of God's moral law, people in it for the money, demon-possessed troublemakers, curiosity-seekers looking for a thrill, slackers looking for a hand-out.

To these, Jesus and the apostles issued stern rebukes. They told them what behavior was forbidden and exactly what they must do to escape eternal judgment. Today's lesson deals with what they were to do when a brother—one who had been a fellow-believer, one who had walked along-side, had been a partaker of the Lord's supper, and had been baptized and filled with the Spirit—had fallen into transgression. I notice that the tone here is gentler; there is a definite end in mind, that of reconciliation and full restoration.

The verse from Proverbs lets us know that one who has stepped aside must be dealt with in wisdom. Wounded hearts easily turn to disappointment, disillusionment and rebellion. Once there, satan can build up contentions and reasons that are nearly invincible.

Jesus let us know that if we have caused an offense, we need to reconcile our brother quickly. That was more important than giving an offering; one needed to lay aside the sacrifice, take care of the offense, and then come and offer the gift. The passage also includes

warnings about words of contempt that endanger our standing before God at the judgment. It is a great offense in God's sight to belittle a brother!

Jesus then deals with what we must do if a brother sins against us. First, it must be dealt with privately; one-on-one. Most of the time, if we are wise and gentle, we can take care of the matter at that point, and no damage is done. If that doesn't happen, He then advises to deal with the erring brother with two or three witnesses. Once again, with the assuring care of a small group of brothers, the erring one can be won to repentance. However, at last resort, when the transgressor is resistant to the first and second admonitions, we are to take him before the congregation. I still see a motive here of reconciliation. All words and deeds are to that end! If it still does not avail, then and only then is the transgressor to be pronounced as someone who is not a believer, not a part of the church, anymore.

Our memory verse reinforces this gentle, yet firm, effort for restoring an erring brother to the fold. Gentleness and meekness are enjoined, and why? Because the temptation that tripped up our brother or sister could very likely cause us to fall as well. How very necessary to this procedure are the heart-qualities of gentleness and humility!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *A Brother Offended*: What are two possible interpretations of this verse in Proverbs?
2. *Danger of Judgment*: What words cause this? What English word comes from this Greek root?
3. *First Things First*: What is the first step toward a brother that transgresses?
4. *What Comes Next?* After the brother isn't persuaded, one-on-one, then what?
5. *Two or Three Witnesses*: And if he doesn't hear them?
6. *Tell it to the Church*: What are the last steps to take? Why?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

This lesson seemed to be a natural follow-up to the lessons on

offenses and forgiveness. As in the lesson on biblical division, there is a time when a judgment or distinction must be made if a person persists in error or sin after admonition and attempts for reconciliation.

Jesus doesn't spell out all the things we must NOT do when a brother does us wrong, but they are quite obvious. First of all, when He says to go to the brother privately, we can know that spreading the news of a brother's transgression before we ever go to him is the most hurtful thing we can ever do. How any of us ever justify such behavior is incomprehensible. All avenues toward restoration of the brother are totally blocked. This action establishes the "bars" of his "castle" of contention.

Secondly, Jesus didn't say that the entire congregation must play "freeze out" with the offending brother before all the required steps of loving and reaching out are taken. This again will extinguish all hopes of reconciliation. I'm afraid this premature judgment and separation has been the cause of many a division, for when one member has been dealt with in this way, it is a human reaction for others to take sides as well, and very soon you have a schism in the making, which could have been avoided had Jesus' words been obeyed.

Another way a transgression is unwisely dealt with is to "preach the Word, brother, and let the chips fall where they will." Jesus didn't say to deal with it like that. I can't think of a time where this has successfully brought restoration, which should be the set goal and intent of all who deal with the problem.

Both sides of a problem can be greatly helped by the gentleness and compassion enjoined here. Lord, help us to deal with each other in Your loving way!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

During a time when most houses were built of wood and heated by open hearths and fireplaces, the danger of raging fires was a real risk. After a large fire in Philadelphia in 1736, Benjamin Franklin advised Philadelphians that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He was instrumental in starting the first fire department that

same year—The Union Fire Company—and specific guidelines were implemented of how they would, in the event of a fire, attempt to put out flames, save goods, and protect from looters.

In the language of that day, this is what he purportedly said referable to fire risks: “I would advise ‘em to take care how they suffer living coals in a full shovel, to be carried out of one room into another, or up or down stairs, unless in a warmingpan shut; for scraps of fire may fall into chinks and make no appearance until midnight; when your stairs being in flames, you may be forced, (as I once was) to leap out of your windows, and hazard your necks to avoid being oven-roasted.” The lessons for us in those words when it comes to dealing with our offenses are many!

Clearly, preventing offenses is better than trying to “fix them” afterwards. But what if they have already happened? What about the small, every-day-kind-of-annoyances—scraps of fire, if you will—that we face with people? What about the “big” hurts and offenses—the heart-breaking, painful kinds of things that cause us to wet our pillows with tears at night and cause heartache? Jesus knew we would face these kinds of things, knew the potential for damage they could cause, but also yearned for harmony between His children. He not only first showed us what reconciliation looks like when he carried His cross to Calvary, He also gave us clear and specific guidelines on how to most effectively “fight our fires” in order to affect the greatest possibility of reconciliation with those with whom we have conflict.

—Sis. Julie Elwell

DECEMBER 24, 2017

DIFFERENCES

Romans 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

1 Corinthians 12:4 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1 Peter 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE: But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. —Romans 14:10

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Although there are differences in opinions, personal requirements, gifts, methods of operation, and ways of speaking, we are to recognize and value those differences, not belittle them, judge them or condemn our brother for them, remembering that we are each responsible before God for ourselves.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Romans 14:1 “Receive ye”: take to yourselves, with kindness, into Christian fellowship. “Not to doubtful disputations”: Not to judge his doubtful thoughts or criticize his scruples. “Do not reject any from your Christian communion because of their particular sentiments on things which are in themselves indifferent. Do not

curiously inquire into their religious scruples, nor condemn them on that account. Entertain a brother of this kind rather with what may profit his soul, than with curious disquisitions on speculative points of doctrine” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

I Corinthians 12:4 “Diversities” and 12:5 “Differences”:
distinctions arising from a different distribution to different persons.

I Corinthians 12:5 “Administrations”:
service; ministry; ministrations.

I Corinthians 12:6 “Operations”:
energizings; workings; effect; results. From a root word which is our word for *energy*.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In today’s lesson Paul warns the church against unfair judgment of brethren who have differences. The Roman letter explains the liberty and fellowship which should be extended toward one another, regardless of the scruples one honestly has or doesn’t have. To the Corinthians, he establishes that differences in manners of service or the results produced should not bring division, but that all should remember it is the same Holy Spirit working, however differently, in all the distributed gifts. In another place, he also asked, “Who made you differ from one another?” and another time he advised that comparing ourselves with each other is not wise.

Peter also admonishes that, no matter how God has gifted you, you are to do your ministry with the ability He has given, simply, humbly, and without feeling lifted up or inferior if your manner differs from another.

Paul reminds that the different gifts are for the profit of everyone; Peter teaches that the whole point is that God would be glorified.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Personal Accountability*: The reason we should not judge one another because of differences is that we are each responsible to our _____, before Whom we _____ or _____.

2. *Mutual Blessing*: The Holy Spirit is given individually so that we may _____.
3. *The Point Is*: What is to be the motive behind all ministering?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

There is a story in the book of Judges about a battle between the men of Ephraim and the Gileadites. To keep the Ephraimites from escaping, the men of Gilead gave all fugitives a pronunciation test. If a man could not pronounce “Shibboleth” but could only say “Sibboleth,” they determined he was of Ephraim and killed him. Thousands died because of this cruel bigotry (Judges 12:1-7).

I think of the unnecessary *spiritual* war carnage that is a result of brethren making so much over differences as ridiculous as the Gileadites and Ephraimites. Here it is, as clear as can be in the scriptures, that we are to receive one another without judging, and we still stumble over this. Most of the time it is well-meaning. We are seriously endeavoring to be valiant for truth. We do think we are doing God service, yet we only end up injuring precious souls. I’m so glad God is the ultimate judge of all. He will judge us righteously and in mercy. But how can we get it right? How can we keep the necessary separation between truth and error, light and darkness, and receive those who think or do differently than we do? I found this writing of Bro. C. E. Orr helpful:

“If I were to say that Jesus does not require us all to live alike, there are some who would say that is a compromising utterance. I do say it, and I will go farther and say that God does not require us in all instances to live now what He may have required of us in the past. God may have required a certain sort of life of you in the past that He does not now, and He will require a life of you in the future that He does not now if you walk life’s way hand in hand with Him. Will you please read Matthew 19:12. There Jesus plainly teaches that He does not require us all to live alike. Some are not able to receive what others are able to receive, and never will be. You are to live to all you are able to receive, but you are not to make this the rule for some other life” (Charles E. Orr, *The Rule of a Saintly Life*).

There are other good counsels he goes on to give, but I think the essence is, “Keep a heart sincerely open and willing before God, and

gentle and merciful to others.” May God help us all to discover the balance.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

A man was inquiring of the Lord just how we would all be able to get along in heaven. Would there be a special room so that the process could begin to alleviate personality differences, lay aside opinions and have all differences settled? What procedure would make it possible to live in harmony in heaven? The Lord replied, "Yes, there is such a place. It's called 'life.' "

We have been given a serious charge in this lesson today as to how we treat our fellow man. Every soul is lovingly designed by God. In turn, it is with great respect that we should also view and value each person, especially those within the body of Christ. Do I disregard my brother because of his upbringing? Do I value a saint of God less because of his family name? Do I have a feeling of superiority over those that I view as less intelligent than me? Do I harbor prejudices for those who are not like me?

We need the Lord to help us to have such a devotion to one another and fulfill the love of Christ. "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20).

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

DECEMBER 31, 2017

CONCLUSION

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.

I Corinthians 1:10 Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

I Corinthians 10:17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Philippians 1:27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ...that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

MEMORY VERSE: Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous. —I Peter 3:8

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Because unity is a precious gift from the Father, was prophesied of Zion, God's church, and was prayed for by Jesus—His death being the means of gathering us into one; because by the new birth and the baptism by the Holy Spirit we are members of His one body, and therefore of each other; because we are called to holiness and oneness; we are now to forsake division and strife, and endeavor to keep, with humility, compassion, affectionate love, and godly conversation, this God-given unity and oneness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 133:1 "A song of degrees": a song of ascents, to the three great pilgrim feasts, i.e. to be sung on way up to Jerusalem.

Psalm 120-134 and Psalm 84:6 were used in this way. "Good": beautiful; agreeable. "Pleasant": delightful; sweetly sounding; musical.

Psalm 133:2: "That went down to the skirts of his garments": "Christian affection knows no limits of parish, nation, sect or age. Is the man a believer in Christ? Then he is in the one body, and I must yield him an abiding love. Is he one of the poorest, one of the least spiritual, one of the least lovable? Then he is as the skirts of the garment, and my heart's love must fall even upon him. Brotherly love comes from the head, but falls to the feet. Its way is downward. It 'ran down,' and it 'went down': love for the brethren condescends to men of low estate, it is not puffed up, but is lowly and meek. This is no small part of its excellence, oil would not anoint if it did not flow down, neither would brotherly love diffuse its blessing if it did not descend" (*Treasury of David*).

Romans 12:10 "Kindly affectioned": devoted, tender love; that special affection shared between members of God's family. There is no other word like it in the New Testament. "In honour preferring one another": take the lead or set an example in showing honor.

I Corinthians 1:10 "Perfectly joined": complete; prepare; fit together; adjust down to properly fit; bring into proper condition and working order. It is the same word as "restore" in Galatians 6:1 and "perfect" in I Peter 5:10. It is also used in the term "mending their nets" in Mark 1:19.

I Corinthians 10:17 "One bread": one loaf, referring to the loaf shared in the Communion of Christ. Because there is one loaf composed of many grains, we, who are many, compose one body.

Galatians 3:28 "Jew nor Greek": terms "intended to be an exhaustive division of the human race, just as 'bond or free,' 'male and female.' This verse marks the immense stride made by Christianity in sweeping away the artificial distinctions which had been the bane of the ancient world and prevented any true feeling of brotherhood springing up in it. Christianity, at one stroke, established the brotherhood and abolished the distinctions" (*Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*).

Ephesians 4:3 "Endeavouring": make haste; give diligence; make every effort. The same word as "study" in II Timothy 2:15 and "labor" in Hebrews 4:11.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Psalm 133 is one of the most beautiful descriptions of Zion, God's holy church, among the prophecies in the Old Testament. The Psalmist describes two substances that were very pure—the holy anointing oil put upon the high priest in the tabernacle, and the dew that descended upon the mountains. It gives us the truth that the unity given to the church is something very special and pure. It must descend from God, not come up from the earth, or man. It was not put upon strangers, nor mixed up for personal use. Dew is not just any kind of water; it is distilled—the purest of all liquids.

Jesus prayed that we all might be one; He then gave His own body to bring to life the church, His bride, and with that offering of Himself He gathered all His scattered people into one body. In the last supper with His disciples, He portrayed this with the symbolism of the one loaf of unleavened bread He shared with His disciples and the one cup of which they all drank. Paul clearly applied this when writing to the Corinthians about the purity of the one body of Christ.

In other epistles, Paul enjoins those who have been called into one body to stand together, strive together, have minds together; to have tender love, compassion, courtesy, humility, forbearance, patience and gentleness toward each other.

As we have studied in earlier lessons, there were many different kinds of people now worshipping together in one church. There were different locations, different disciples with differing gifts, distributing the gospel with different methods. Paul himself had strong differences of opinion with his own co-workers; at times they went their separate ways (as in the example of Barnabas and John Mark going on a separate journey from Paul and Silas, Acts 15:36, and the dissension with Peter, Galatians 2:11). We find later hints of reconciliation and fellowship.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Comparison:* To what substances is unity compared?
2. *Special Kind:* What kind of love were the brethren to have?
3. *The Same Kind:* In I Corinthians 1:10, what three things are

to be the same?

4. *Sharing Communion*: Jesus' body is compared to the _____
_____.
5. *No Difference*: What distinctions between people are done away in Christ?
6. *Keeping Unity*: What attitudes and actions do this?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

"All efforts of union but that of God's holiness is like pounding cold crooked pieces of iron against each other to make them fit together. The more blows, the more crooks and differences. Put them into a furnace of white heat, and they will lose their cold, stiff, crooked individuality, and flow into one mass.

That is God's way of uniting his people, in the fire of the Holy Spirit...On the plane of Bible holiness, no outward observances are made a test, in fact nothing is made a test of fellowship. For holy men 'judge not from appearance, but judge righteous judgment.' 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin' (I John 1:7).

Fellowship is of the Spirit (Philippians 2:1), and exists where heart-purity exists. It is the conscious blending of hearts filled with the same Holy Spirit. One may have been led into all truth, the other not. This does not interrupt fellowship. Nevertheless it is the duty of such as "know the truth," in meekness to instruct others who do not. Ignorance of some truth does not destroy fellowship, but resisting the truth does; because it forfeits salvation. We must not sanction people's errors, but if saved, show our love and fellowship to them, so long as they do not give the evidence that their wrong doctrines have become willful, or they have in some way lost salvation. Then fellowship ends, but love and kindness still continue in faithful efforts for their salvation.

To ignore fellowship simply because of some doctrinal error is bigotry. To agree to disagree, or to put on an equality truth and error, is babel confusion. To know the truth is our privilege; to teach the truth our duty; but to have fellowship with the pure and upright of heart is an involuntary and spontaneous fact. Sects are the result

of carnality; nothing but perfect holiness destroys carnality, and thus removes both sectism and its cause. The fire of God's love saves the soul, harmonizes all hearts that receive it, leads them into perfect and uniform obedience to all truth, and drives afar all who refuse to pass through its purging fire, and gain the plane of holy fellowship" (D. S. Warner, The Church of God, What It Is and What It Is Not).

When Bro. Warner wrote these words, he was in the height of an unmistakable movement of God all over the world, as thousands of saints caught the vision of holiness and unity and came together in one body. Shortly after Warner's death in 1895, several divisions rocked the momentum of the movement, bringing shock and sadness to precious souls. People divided over the doctrine of inward cleansing in sanctification, the issue of racial integration, and the prohibition of outward adornment. Many souls were discouraged and gave up their profession; others went back to their former sectarian churches. Some formed strict, harsh sects of their own, and some drifted, isolated, searching for likeminded people with whom to fellowship. The mainstream group began spiraling downward, taking in worldliness and human-led organization. Splinter factions formed different groups, each keeping the name, "Church of God" and each professing to be the "true body."

Today many find themselves sifting through these many pieces and earnestly desiring to *be* that biblical Zion, that city set upon a hill, the holy bride of Christ. We are at the midnight hour, waiting for the bridegroom. Will we go with Him to the marriage feast, clothed in white raiment, or will we be foolish, not having the oil of the Holy Spirit? We have been given a precious heritage, a legacy of truth preached in its fullness and demonstrated by godly lives. We have the vision laid out in the Scriptures of God's pure and holy church. It is our responsibility to be filled with the Holy Spirit and live out that pure and holy fellowship that comes from above. Let us sincerely "make every effort" to keep, restore and seek the unity of the Spirit. May God help us!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The piano is one of the greatest musical inventions of all times and to enjoy its music is one of life's great pleasures. There is something distinctively beautiful about it—from the simplest melody to the most complicated and intricate masterpiece.

Diverse notes placed in different positions all along the keyboard. All equally important. All in their respective places. All silently waiting for the master's touch. Each key tuned individually, not to each other but to a common pitch.

The proper tuning is imperative to the harmony. Yet the process of tuning is both rigid and delicate. The 'tune master' must twist the screws and stretch the wires and apply the pressure seemingly to the point of breaking until he hears the right sound— that perfect note.

Every key that will be used by the master *must* be tuned no matter how painful the process. For one key to be out of tune or silent when touched, impacts the continuity and harmony intended by the composer. That single note was absolutely necessary at that particular moment in that specific place.

We are diverse people of diverse ethnicities. Our backgrounds are different, our abilities are different. One is not better than the other, just different from the other. We must remember that we are different by the design of the Creator and not by accident. And just as one key on the piano cannot subjugate nor take the place of another, neither can we. We each are needed equally to produce the harmony intended by the Master.

I am amazed at how an accomplished pianist can adeptly navigate the keyboard never hitting an off note. God is the master at harmonizing his people. He makes no mistakes. Our duty is to allow ourselves to be tuned by his Spirit and in tune with his Will. We cannot tune ourselves to a political agenda, to a church group or to an arbitrary doctrine. The Holy Spirit is our "common pitch" We must be tuned to the Spirit of God and by the Spirit of God. Only then can we truly be in harmony with one another.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

Let Us Be One

Come all ye ransomed, let us be one,
One as the Father, Spirit and Son;
Heart joined to heart and hand joined to hand,
Let us march together to the promised land.

Hear ye the call from heaven today,
Let all division vanish away;
Love all embracing then will unite
In a host triumphant for the truth and right.

All ye are brethren, Jesus hath said,
All of one body, having one head;
Only one heaven all hope to gain,
Let us not divided anymore remain.

Sweet is the fellowship that doth flow
Into the hearts this unity know;
Strong are the ties that bind soul to soul,
They shall not be severed while the ages roll.

Chorus:

Let us be one, O let us be one,
So that the prayer of Christ we fulfill;
Let us be one, yes, ever be one,
Thus shall we do God's holy will.

—C. W. Naylor
#112, *His Praise Anew*
Published by the Gospel Trumpet Company, 1936

