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UNITED BY THE WORD OF GOD

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The greatest concern of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was about to depart from the earth for heaven was how the young church would survive the furious assaults of Satan and successfully accomplish its mission. In order to protect and enable His church He has given it two great gifts. One is the Holy Spirit and the other is the word of God. These two are always working together in fulfilling Christ's will on earth.

Even while Christ was with them, His disciples were not quite united. Each of them still maintained their inherent weaknesses. Often they quarreled with each other. They were not able to overcome their selfishness. If they could not maintain unity while Christ was with them, how much more difficult it would be after their Master had departed.

The subject of Jesus' earnest prayer on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane was the unity of His disciples after His departure.

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom you have given Me, that they may be one as We are I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. (John 17:11,20,21)¹

¹All Scripture passages quoted in this paper are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

The Holy Spirit and the word of God work together in bringing and maintaining unity among God's church. The Holy Spirit is working tirelessly among God's people to bring unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. He gives spiritual gifts to each individual to strengthen the unity of the church. The unity and love among the followers of Jesus is the most powerful and irrefutable evidence that they are true people of God (John 13:34-35).

The Holy Spirit does not work apart from the word of God. He works with the word of God for unity. Unity apart from the word of God cannot be conceived; it is not a unity at all; it is a false unity or a conspiracy. Adventists are people of the Bible. The Bible alone is the norm and standard for every belief and all conduct. "To the law and the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (Isa 8:20 NIV). God has warned us that there would always be attempts of Satan to make us stray from the sure truth.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim 4:3-5)

On his way to Jerusalem, realizing that it would be that last opportunity to see the leaders of the church of Ephesus, Paul called them to Miletus to give them practical instructions. He counseled them,

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32)

The word of God is the only safe foundation on which to build up our faith. Only the word of God protects us from the attack of savage wolves. The word of God alone keeps us from all kinds of perverse teaching and doctrines. The word of God helps us preserve our sound and pure doctrine. The word of God binds us together in unity despite the diversity among us. "The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O Lord, You shall preserve them from this generation forever" (Ps 12:6-7).

Our church is firmly established upon the unchanging word of God. “On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt 16:18 NIV). Jesus said,

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matt 7:24-27 NIV)

God has established His church as the depository of the truth. “The Lord chose a people and made them the depositories of His truth,” Ellen G. White wrote concerning the Seventh-day Adventist Church.² At another time, she stated, “We have many duties to perform because we have been made the depositories of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory.”³ “The church of the living God” is “the pillar and foundation of the truth,” Paul declared in 1 Tim 3:15. The church has to make every effort to preserve the truth and to disseminate it to the world. The mission of the church has not changed since its inception, for the truth is unchangeable. No matter how much the world and society have been changing, the truth is always the truth. It is established forever.

God has revealed the truth in the Bible. But people have neglected some parts of it and have even forgotten them almost completely. The enemy of the truth has distorted the truth. A certain portion of the truth has been kept sealed until the designated time comes. God has unsealed such truth in these last days. He has chosen and appointed a people to “build the old waste places” to “raise up the foundations of many generations,” and to repair the breach (Isa 58:12). In the middle of the nineteenth century a group of earnest Bible students restored many of the neglected and forgotten truths in their full measure. These landmark truths are the literal second advent of Jesus Christ; the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus, our High Priest, has been ministering on behalf of His people and an investigative judgment has been in process since 1844; the Three Angels’ Messages of Rev 14:6-12; the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath; the non-immortality of the human soul; and the revelation of the Spirit of prophecy.⁴

²Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1855-1909, 1948), 8:25.

³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923, 1962), 31.

⁴See Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1946), 30-31.

The enemy of the truth has been constantly attacking these landmarks. Scholars have brought up many plausible theories which dilute the landmark truths. Ministers are preaching these landmarks less and less in the pulpits. Instead they are pronouncing louder and louder that we are not very much different from other Protestant denominations. But if we de-emphasize the identifying truths, we lose our identity and our mission.

Our church and its doctrines have been tested by, and have survived the rain of higher criticism, the stream of pantheism, the storm of skepticism, and the wind of modern liberalism for about one hundred and fifty years. There will be even greater deluges and typhoons which will beat and shake the foundation of our faith as we come near the end of the world's history. No matter how strong these storms may be, the church whose foundation is laid upon the solid rock, the word of God, will stand firm. Everyone who builds his faith upon the word of God will overcome them all.

Satan is constantly attacking God's people with skepticism in order to lead them to doubt the very foundation of our faith. Started from within academia, such dangerous and destructive skepticism is even preached in the church pulpits.

The inspiration of the Bible, the authenticity of the gift of prophecy, the literal creation account, the Three Angels' Messages, the heavenly sanctuary doctrine, and our distinctive eschatological views, are all severely challenged and attacked by Satan under the disguise of intellectualism. As leaders of God's church we should be vigilant in defending our landmark truths and in protecting God's people from the influence of theological liberalism, which denies God's activity in history as well as the authority of God's word.

"Our only safety is in preserving the ancient landmarks," advises Ellen G. White.⁵

Our faith in reference to the message of the first, second, and third angels was correct. The great waymarks we have passed are immovable. Although the hosts of hell may try to tear them from their foundation, and triumph in the thought that they have succeeded, yet they do not succeed. The pillars of truth stand firm as the eternal hills, unmoved by all the efforts of men combined with those of Satan and his host.⁶

In Eph 4:13-15, Paul emphasizes the necessity for us to "all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

⁵Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:199.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946, 1970), 223.

We, as leaders of God's church, should make every effort to cooperate with Christ in preserving the unity of the church and the purity of the truth so that He may "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" (Eph 5:27).