

FAMILY UNITY
By Paul Penno Jr.
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Psalm 133:1

In real life, family life is often not the kiss and make up stuff that these TV shows portray. For so many families, behind closed doors there is painful conflict. It shouldn't really be surprising, because every family is comprised of mere mortals—imperfect people. And imperfect people regularly have conflicts.

Every family needs to deal with conflict. Married couples fight as they try to merge two individuals into one couple. Parents disagree about how they should raise their children. Children fight with each other and their parents because they don't get their own way.

“Family Living” is living out the truths of genuine righteousness by faith. It is not what we must *do* in order to have happy homes. The Bible emphasis is on things that we must *believe* in order to have happy homes, because it is what we believe that transforms us in character from being the ornery, self-centered people that we are by nature into people in whom self has been crucified with Christ and He is permitted to live out His life within us (Gal. 2:20).

Self-centered people are bound to have friction at home; the real, ultimate, powerful change in family relationships comes through the pure truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is what Ellen White described as “the third angel’s message in verity.”

Through this means actual, dynamic love is created within cold hearts.

There are three of the Ten Commandments which deal with family life: Honor thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife. It’s the violation of these three (in some way) that usually is the source of family unhappiness. Let us not misunderstand the Ten Commandments. Rightly understood, they are not Ten Rules. They are ten *promises that God is making* to us.

The Preamble to the Ten must never be omitted—believe that “the Lord thy God. . . . have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, [that is] out of the house of bondage,” that He has done it past tense, which means that Christ on His cross *has delivered* you from the bondage of sin (Ex. 20:1, 2). Then, He promises, you will never fall into any sin that consciously or unconsciously can poison the joyous spirit in your family.

The story of the Bible brings the tenderness, the humility, the purity, of true love into our naturally cold hearts. When God has promised to “send [us] Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5, 6), what’s back of the promise is that marvelous work of “heart-reconciliation.” Notice the actual words of the promise: “He will turn. . . . hearts.”

Many people have said, “My heart is cold; I don’t know how to shed a tear of appreciation for the love of Christ! Is there no hope for me?” Cold-heartedness is the greatest problem God has had to deal with in His 6000 years of sacred history. It’s

the problem of Laodicea. “Elijah” is coming to deal with it! Don’t resist his ministry, for it will be what Paul points us to in 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19 where he pleads, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”! That’s the very essence of the Elijah message! It’s not calling down thunderbolts of God’s hot wrath on His people, which many of us have thought Elijah did on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:10-40)—it’s melting of hard human hearts and reconciliation first, with God, then with each other.

Then, thank God! the entire world church will be studying the Song of Solomon! This must be because somehow “Elijah” has touched our hearts! Did you know that the Laodicean message, which is present truth to the remnant church, is related to this Song? Jesus actually quotes word for word from S. S. 5:2 when He says, “I stand at the door and knock.” Thus He tells us that the Laodicean message is actually a love letter from Christ to His Bride-to-be!

“She” has treated Him exactly like the lady in Solomon’s poem treated Him—she was so wrapped up in herself that she didn’t want to bother to get up and let Him in when He “knocked” (S. S. 5:2-6). The Song of Solomon is directly related both to the Laodicean message and to that of Revelation 19:7, 8, where the identical problem is divulged as the “Bride-to-be” delaying to make herself ready” for the marriage of the Lamb!

That’s the reason why after all these many years since 1844 when Jesus said that it was His will that “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled” (Matt. 24:34). Yes, Jesus

intended all along that the generation which went through the Great Disappointment should live to see Him come the second time. But through our resisting His call to the wedding of 1888, the time has been greatly prolonged. May His reconciliation be our experience!

The twin principles of corporate solidarity and *agape*, supremely revealed at the cross, form the basis for all family unity. The key to all family unity, whether it be in the home front, the local church, or schools resides in the truth that the Son of God became part of the human race and took our human nature upon His divine nature. The incarnation is the basis for the biblical principle of corporate solidarity.

The Son of God in coming in flesh, our flesh, became the new head of the human race, the second Adam. [This fundamental principle in many ways underscored the messages of A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner in the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference and its aftermath which received the enthusiastic endorsement of Ellen White.]

“In assuming humanity, Christ took the part of every human being. He was the Head of humanity. A Being divine and human, with His long human arm He could encircle humanity, while with His divine arm He could lay hold of the throne of the Infinite. What a sight was this for Heaven to look upon! Christ, who knew not the least taint of sin or defilement, took our nature in its deteriorated condition. This was humiliation greater than finite man can comprehend. God was manifest in the

flesh. He humbled Himself. What a subject for thought, for deep, earnest contemplation!"¹

Through the body of Jesus Christ on the cross all humanity has been reconciled to God and to one another (Eph. 2:11-16, Col. 1:21-23). In a similar manner on the same basis of corporate solidarity we can say that "through the body of Jesus Christ on the cross all humanity has been justified and acquitted" (Rom. 3:24; 4:5, 25; 5:10; 5:18). It is upon this principle of corporate solidarity we say that God chose, predestined, elected, and adopted all mankind in Christ.

The Son of God became us by coming "in the likeness of sinful flesh" and when He died on the cross, from a corporate point of view, the whole race of men died in Him. So even though Jews and Gentiles are still fighting like cats and dogs in Palestine and Israel, God sees both Jews and Gentiles united together as one in Christ Jesus "having created in Himself one new man from two thus making peace."

Apart from being united with Christ all this good news will avail naught to bring about family unity whether in the home, the church, or in schools. Even an intellectual grasp of the incarnation and corporate solidarity and the reality that through the blood of the cross that Christ has reconciled all things in heaven and earth to God thus making peace,—this reality will fail to bring unity apart from the abiding presence of the Spirit of Christ in the heart.

So not only Jews and Gentiles are squabbling and literally killing one another in Palestine, so Christians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are squabbling and killing each other by character assassination over theological and philosophical issues because both groups, Jews and Gentiles on the one hand, and Christians on the other, refuse to be crucified with Christ. Self will always insist on reigning supreme irrespective of the cost to the Son of God.

Only when we catch a glimpse of that *agape* of Christ in condescending to step down from the royalty of heaven and to become one of us and die our second death at Calvary—only when that indescribable love penetrates our very soul, our mind, and heart will unity in the family begin to prevail whether it be in the home, the church, or schools.

When the love of Christ begins to constrain us, we will acknowledge, even in situations where we believe we were not necessarily at fault, that "I was wrong, I take responsibility for difficulties that have arisen here."

The goodness of God will lead us to both personal and corporate repentance. The love of Christ will cause us to esteem the other person better than our self. The love of Christ will compel us not to criticize the other party and justify our self. The love of Christ dwelling within the heart will constrain us not to bring a reviling accusation upon our brother.

When this evidence begins to appear in our lives we will know the meaning of justification by faith because we will have peace with God having been

¹ *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 252.

justified by faith. Then the following saying will be brought to pass:

“What is justification by faith?—It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself. When men see their own nothingness, they are prepared to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. When they begin to praise and exalt God all the day long, then by beholding they are becoming changed into the same image. What is regeneration?—It is revealing to man what is his own real nature, that in himself he is worthless.”²

Here is the key to family unity. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). There is no earthly joy as sweet as for father, mother, and the children to be close a knit family where each trusts the other, love best the other, and enjoys being together. They are one. If your family is like that you just simply shout to glory hallelujah and praise God. It is not often that families are so united.

It is frankly acknowledged that the only effective way a family can have unity in this blessed sense is to be bathed in the love of God.

There are untold sources of books and study courses available from psychiatrists and family counselors and psychologists. Various publishers are turning out a steady stream of books and magazines about family unity. Many claim that they have found a special key to achieving unity in the

family. Try this! Try that! Some new method. The source of this delightful family unity is the knowledge of the love of God.

The next important clue to finding family unity is to recognize that the only way we can learn to appreciate the love of God is through understanding what happened when Christ made His great sacrifice on His cross.

Again, we are not referred to this or that psychologist or new school thought or even to some new video or movie that may help us to understand what happened on the cross. No! Notably we do not suggest that we pore over movies on the crucifixion. Watching movies or videos is a poor substitute for reading the word of God, the Bible.

Yet, in many churches, reading the Bible is all but forgotten. And people imagine that they are getting spiritual food by watching movies in which sinful mortals like ourselves as actors posing for the Lord Jesus Christ. There is not a man on planet earth who is qualified to pose for a portrait of Jesus Christ. And there is no one who is qualified to act the part in a movie that represents Jesus Christ.

Far better to read the story in the naked Bible and let the Holy Spirit impart to your own soul image of what Jesus looked like or what He may have sounded like. Videos and movies will most certainly distort the comprehension of what Jesus really was like.

What Jesus said is this, “I, if I, am lifted up from the earth will draw all people unto me. This He said signifying what death He should die” (John 12:32, 33, NKJV).

² *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 9, p. 62; Nov. 22, 1896.

The cross of Christ was an event so far greater than any film crew could ever have shot that we need to repent of this modern species of idolatry of wanting to mystify and distort and substitute for the truth of God what God wants us to know—substituting something that takes the place of the knowledge of the cross that is available only from reading the word of God itself.

The arms of the cross extend from Paradise Lost to Paradise regained. The cross is the cosmic eternal event that the Holy Spirit makes so vivid and real to our souls that it seems to us that it happens right now today. Even though the event took place physically 2000 years ago, it has meaning for us today.

The blessed unity in the home begins, of course, in the relationship of a husband to a wife. Children long for this unity to exist in the family. But if the parents don't have it within themselves, the children are helpless to try to manufacture it. They just grow up dreadfully deprived.

Father and mother find this unity in their loyalty to each other and in their reverence for their marriage vows.

That raises a common problem: Suppose only one of the two really wants the unity and is seeking for it. What is that one to do who realizes the need for it? It is easy for us to give a little glib answer and say, Oh yes, don't worry. Let us pray about it. But often prayer becomes a mere substitute for action to do the right thing. It masks a hidden selfishness.

The one who prays can do much more than merely to pray. He or she who is hoping and

longing for unity and peace in the marriage can understand the problem and can work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit who is ready to effect a solution and to bring healing.

Unity in our families is something that is very important to the Lord. The love is in the divine equation of the apostle John when he said, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). In the Greek language that word is *agape*. It is the kind of love that does not depend on human goodness for it to exist. That kind of love is sovereign, free, independent. That kind of love loves bad people, selfish people, ugly people. And that is the kind of love that we need in the family.

Now, it is painful for one member of the family or one marriage partner to stand alone enduring ridicule or persecution and all the while having the wisdom that divine love imparts. That one who wants unity stands ten feet tall, as it were, a calm, divine wisdom inspiring his constant attitude.

Jesus grew up in a dysfunctional family that was not united. His six or more step siblings were a constant irritation to Him (Matt. 13:55). His siblings were the children of Joseph by a former marriage. They did not believe in Jesus, of course. Jesus endured almost endless irritation from them. And poor Mary didn't know what to make of it all. She was not aware that those step-children who hated Jesus were acting out the normal role of the fallen human race. They were just like everybody else.

But Jesus expressed that *agape* love. Yes, the Bible tells us, He was *agape*. In loving His family members with that kind of love Jesus engaged in a constant ministry in His family.

We read of two of the brothers who were converted at last. And we don't know what finally happened to the two or more girls. But the point of saying this is to encourage anybody who lives in a so-called dysfunctional family not to despair. Jesus endured the trial fully. His patience and His exercise of this love did result in some conversions from His own family. That is an encouragement to all of us. And especially to any spouse who stands alone in a marriage or in a family who wants to be loyal to God.

The last blessing that Jesus prayed for His disciples the night before His crucifixion in John 17, was Jesus prayed just before His crucifixion, "that [we who would follow Him] be one, as we [He and the Father] are," "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" (John 17:11, 21). In a larger sense this prayer is often understood to be appropriate for the church fellowship. And some interpret it as though the Lord wants all denominations to break down their denominational distinctions and become one church. If all the denominations were to do that, it would be under the headship of the Pope of Rome.

It is possible for the family to enjoy this heart-unity even though their faith may be different from the faith of the multitude of the churches that in the Bible phraseology are Babylon.

It is good for parents to explain the truth so clearly that the children will not be afraid when they realize that their understanding of Bible prophecy is different. Sharing together this persecution or this

ostracism further strengthens the bond of unity within the family. May the dear Lord bless father and mother as they teach the essentials of the third angel's message to the children so that they understand why we are different from the Sunday-keeping churches.

At first thought, or in superficial thought, it seems strange that in his letter to the Ephesians Paul says to the husbands, "Love your wives even as Christ loved the church." But Paul does not tell the wives love your husbands. I wonder why? Instead he tells the wives submit to your husbands (Eph. 5:21).

Is Paul teaching that wives should be doormats? (Eph. 5:22). No, let us read the passage very carefully. Paul is telling everybody in the churches submit to one another. And the idea certainly is not that all become doormats. No way! Paul's idea is a very wise one. Let each person in the church or in the family realize the priesthood of all believers together; that one may see a truth that others are not able to see right now. We must listen to one another. Someone else may know a better way than we do to solve a problem.

Let the family members respect one another. Yes, let the parents respect the thinking of the children. It is quite possible that the children might see something that the parents can't see. That is part of what Psalm 133 really means when it speaks of "how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in unity."

Even if there has been in the past a lack of unity in the family, that condition can be healed by the grace of God. Let parents be encouraged in the Lord. Yes, let children be encouraged in the Lord. It

is often possible that children are closer to Christ than the parents are. That is why Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Let the role model be reversed. Let the children teach something that is important. God hears the children's prayers. And he works with them. There is truth in the Bible passage that speaks of how "a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11:6). Of course, the proper context is the earth made new; when the lion and the lamb lay down together. But the phrase can find an interesting application often in situations where the child enjoys a more mature spiritual understanding than the parents do. God is especially attentive to the prayers of such a child.

A happy marriage is one where the two are agreed. And again, it is the function of the husband to be the house band like the hoops on the barrel that keeps things together. But he cannot force unity by an overmastering male dominance.

Men who may be successful in military affairs or in business or in the office or in the factory or as doctors telling nurses what to do, cannot exercise that kind of dominance in the marriage or in the family. The strongest men in the world are those who are meek and lowly as Jesus was. And He tells us, "Take My yoke upon you. I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Ellen White offers a very interesting comment, "However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed.

The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the after years."

And so, be patient and let us learn unity in the way that the Lord wants to teach it to us. No matter how wonderful is the marriage of the husband and wife, there will be times when each must learn to forgive the other. And instead of always punishing the children, let there be forgiveness given whenever possible.

The words of the Bible have power built into them. And these in Colossians 3:13 are powerful. "Put on, therefore, as the elected God." In other words, first of all, know that you are elected by God to eternal salvation and stop worrying about your own salvation. That will help you to be all that much more happy in the family circle. Says Paul, "Holy and beloved, put on tender mercies." Those are strange things for some of us moderns who are caught up in the daily rat-race of the survival of the fittest in modern society.

Thank God, He has given us the holy Sabbath day. It is a time in which we can learn what holy tender mercies are. Then, says Paul, "Put on humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another." Yes, there will be annoyances that call for patience and tenderness in dealing with one another. And that requires what Paul says, "forgiving one another." "If anyone has a complaint against another," And here is the powerful secret, "even as Christ forgave you, so you also."

And when father or mother know that it is their duty to ask forgiveness of a child what a blessing

when they are honest and humble enough task for it. Oh, how we all need this precious life-giving counsel from the word of God. There is power in the words of the Bible, if it is read with understanding.

Do we need to repeat the familiar counsel of the spirit of prophecy in that most precious book *Ministry of Healing*, “As life with its burden with perplexity and care meets the newly wedded pair, the romance with which imagination so often invests marriage disappears. Husband and wife learn each other’s character as it was impossible to learn it before the marriage. This is a most critical period in their experience. The happiness and usefulness of their whole future depends upon their taking the right course now. Often they can also discern each others unsuspected weaknesses and defects. But the hearts that love has united will discern excellencies also here to fore unknown. So let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude. It is the atmosphere that surrounds ourselves that determines what will be revealed to us in somebody else. Many regard the expression of love as a weakness. And they maintain a reserve that repels others. And this spirit checks the current of sympathy. As the social and generous impulses of are repressed, they wither and the heart becomes desolate and cold.”³ Let us be aware of this error.

“So determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other and continue in the early attentions.”

³ *Ministry of Healing*, p. 360

The good news is that Jesus in His closing prayer actually prayed for you and me today. He says, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be one, as you father, are in me that I in you. That they also may be one in us that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20, 21).

So a happy family that is united is a missionary family. They may not be preaching to others or giving Bible studies. But the happiness in unity in the family become well-known in the church and the neighborhood and the result is always soul winning.

A certain town grew up at the foot of a mountain range. It was sheltered there in it’s shadow, so that the cruel wind that threw sleet at the windows and howled through the cracks of homes on the other side, when it came to the foot of the mountain, was a wind spent.

High up in the hills, a strange and quiet fellow took it upon himself to be the Keeper of the springs. Whenever he would see a spring, he cleaned its brown pool of silt and fallen leaves, of mud and mould., and took away all foreign matter, so that the water that bubbled up from the springs was clean and cold and pure.

It leaped sparkling over rocks and dropped joyously in crystal cascades until swollen by other streams, it became a river of life to the busy town.

Millwheels were turned by its rush. Gardens were refreshed by its waters. Fountains threw it like diamonds into the air. On its surface swans swam

lazily, and children laughed and played on its banks in the springtime.

But the city council was a group of penny conscious businessmen. They scanned the budget and found within it a salary for the Keeper of the Springs. The CPA said, "Why are we paying this invisible man? He is never seen. We don't need him. Why if we build a reservoir, we can do away with the position entirely.

So they did. The water filled the concrete basin, but it didn't seem the same. Where before it was sparkling and clear as it moved past the city, now it sat, brown and languid. Soon, it began to show the signs of a green slime. There were constant troubles with the pumps after that, and the swans found a cleaner place above town.

Finally, an epidemic broke out, and the sickness reached its cold hand into every home in the city. The City Council met again, realizing the error of its ways, and called for the Keeper of the Springs to make it right again. It wasn't long until it was right. The springs were cleaned and the water joyfully leaped down the mountain. The Millwheels turned as of old. The swans returned. And children played again by the banks of the stream.