

AN EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION TEACHINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFLICT

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The discussion among Christians concerning women's ordination is not new. This article focuses on the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) context with the goal of identifying biblical reconciliation principles and encouraging their application in all Christian communities. SDA theologians and other leaders have written papers and published articles and books on the topic of women's ordination.¹ The issue has been addressed at various administrative levels, and official actions have been taken.² Regardless, the issue of women's ordination continues to attract wide attention in our discussions.

While many hold strong positions on this issue, inspired writings seem not to give it nearly as much direct attention as some would wish. What if the Bible does not provide the convincing theological traction needed in this area for a decisive, universally-accepted conclusion for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church? The Bible does not always address our current issues with powerful, unequivocal statements. And, regardless of how much scholars and other leaders deny manipulating or bending the text for their purposes, there is a strong temptation to decide what is "best" and then find ingenious biblical supports for our decisions.

The 1995 Utrecht General Conference Session featured debate and action on a motion to give world divisions the right to decide whether or not to ordain women to the pastoral ministry within their territories. Just weeks before that session I was at Andrews University to defend my Doctor of Ministry project on reconciliation and conflict resolution. My research and reflections support the proposal that biblical directions for reconciliation and conflict resolution are certainly relevant to the discussion on women's ordination and to any theological dispute for that matter. This may be especially true where biblical illumination on an issue seems less than crystal clear.

¹For example: Nancy Vyhmeister, ed., *Women in Ministry: Biblical & Historical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998); Mercedes H. Dyer ed., *Prove All Things: A Response to Women in Ministry* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventists Affirm, 2000).

²Actions were voted at General Conference Sessions in 1990 and 1995. Actions in 2012 include those of the Northern German Union Conference, the Columbia Union Conference, the Pacific Union Conference, the Netherlands Union Conference and the General Conference Annual Council. For some indication of Ellen White's opinion about official church actions designed to resolve theological disagreements see par. 2 of the appendix.

Gauging the Conflict

Consider the current intensity of our women's ordination dispute through the lens of Speed Leas' five "Levels of Conflict in the Church."³ These levels move from simple, easily-resolved disagreements to complex, war-like disasters. While there are a number of identifying characteristics for each level, the two characteristics Leas considers to be most significant are the *objectives* and the *language* of conflict participants.⁴

Synopsis of Conflict Levels⁵

At Level I the objective of conflict participants is to work together to resolve the problem. The communication language at this level is direct and clear. Participants do not hide information from each other, and they tend not to slant information to their own advantage.

At Level II the objective has moved to self-protection. Participants are cautious as mutual trust decreases. Participants will speak with each other without much hesitation, but their language becomes more guarded. It leans toward generalizations and may include cloaked insults and jokes with some sting.

At Level III the objective becomes victory. "I am right; you are wrong. I am good; you are bad. I must win; you will lose." The language is emotional and purposely misleading. It is often laced with exaggeration or personal attack. At this level people begin grouping into loose factions.

At Level IV the objective is to punish, wound, or expel opponents. Factions solidify and hope fades that opponents will change. The good of the subgroup is elevated over the good of the whole. Antagonists detach from each other, not communicating directly if they can avoid it. Trust and mutual respect drain away. The language appeals self-righteously to grand principles and tends to ignore specific issues. Criticism of opponents' positions is usually coupled with personal attack. Level IV conflict can result in the ejection of leaders, the exodus or expulsion of factions, and the ending of major ministries. Outside intervention is desirable.

At Level V the objective and language focus on the destruction of the enemy. Outside intervention is imperative.

Conflicts are generally best resolved early and at the lowest level possible. When a dispute reaches critical heights, the level of the conflict needs to be reduced for healthy resolution to take place. As the level of respectful

³Speed Leas has spent over 40 years as an Alban Institute senior consultant to churches and synagogues. During that time he has dealt with numerous religious controversies and divisions and has acquired an international reputation as an expert on conflict resolution.

⁴Speed Leas, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1985), 20.

⁵Leas, 20-25.

communication and mutual understanding is raised, restorative conciliation becomes possible. This is much more likely to happen where participants are keeping biblical peacemaking teachings and applications running in their minds as a backdrop to all other considerations. Being “right” is not necessarily God’s way to righteousness or peace.

Estimate of Women’s Ordination Conflict Level

To what level has our women’s ordination dispute arrived? It is not easy to identify conflict levels, precisely because conflicts do not always move through the levels predictably and because of the somewhat porous boundaries between levels. Also, there are sometimes wide differences in attitude and approach among conflict participants who are on the “same side.” With that said, it appears that denominationally the conflict is at a fairly high Level III, with some tilt toward Level IV.

While most conflict participants still seem to be at least somewhat willing to engage on the specifics related to the ordination of women, the language on both sides has taken on the sound of Level IV. Participants appeal strongly to eternal principles in support of their positions. Those for immediate women’s ordination speak of justice and basic human rights. Those against the immediate ordination of women speak of God’s desire for church unity and worldwide denominational harmony. Only God knows whether these appeals to grand principles are of the “self-righteous” variety.

Another Level IV element in the conflict is sentiment that nothing is likely to change in the General Conference position and that no amount of time spent in further study or discussion will make much, if any, difference. This position was voiced in discussions related to the 2012 actions voted by four separate union conference constituencies in favor of ministerial ordination without regard to gender.⁶ This has resulted in an escalation of rhetoric that reflects increasing conflict within the church.

On October 16, 2012, Seventh-day Adventist world leaders attending the General Conference Annual Council voted a response statement to the ordination-related actions taken by the union conference constituencies. The Annual Council statement strongly disapproves of those actions and states that they are not legitimate.⁷ It points out that planned current and future theological studies and deliberations are preparing the way for the world church to deal with the issue of women’s ordination at the next General Conference session.⁸ It urges the union conferences, along with all other Seventh-day Adventist organizations, to carefully consider the implications

⁶In order of their votes these union conferences are the North German Union Conference (Apr 23), the Columbia Union Conference (July 29), the Pacific Union Conference (Aug 19), and the Netherlands Union Conference (Nov 11).

⁷Annual Council Action 132-12G. Statement on Church Polity, Procedures, and Resolution of Disagreements in the Light of Recent Union Actions on Ministerial Ordination. PRE/PREXAD/GCDO12AC to TNCW-12AC, 2 (2012), 2.

⁸Ibid., 3.

and possible results of taking actions that contradict standing decisions of the world church at General Conference sessions.⁹ And it asserts that the world church in General Conference session holds the highest administrative authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁰ Significantly, the Annual Council statement does not announce or call for any punitive action toward the union conferences. This may be an attempt by world leaders to halt the conflict climb and even to begin decreasing its intensity.

Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution Basics

For the purposes of this work conflict is *a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone's goals or desires*.¹¹

Conflict Opportunities

Most Christians associate conflict entirely with sin, pain, and loss. This is unfortunate, because differences in purpose and opinion that frustrate goals and desires frequently open doorways to advancement and breakthroughs in learning, planning, creativity, and healthy relationships. When God is allowed to guide the conflict resolution and reconciliation process, conflicts can lead to extraordinary blessing and spiritual growth (for examples consider Gen 32-33; 2 Kgs 6:8-23; Dan 1; Acts 6:1-7; 15:1-35).

It would be helpful for Christians to see conflicts in a more positive light. Indeed, conflicts provide Christians with definite openings to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31-11:1), minister to opponents (Lk 6:27-31; Rom 12:17-21), and grow in Christlikeness (2 Cor 12:7-10).¹² When conflicts are seen as potential opportunities for good to be grasped under God's guidance instead of hazards to be avoided or threats to be attacked, there is much more likelihood of lasting resolution and growing goodwill.

Conflict Catalysts: Diversity, Misunderstanding, and Sin¹³

There are at least three major catalysts for human conflict. The first is our diversity, which stems from God's creation of this world. God's amazing design specifies that we multiply with a vast and growing variety. Humans are exceptionally diverse in their personalities, experiences, goals, methods, priorities, preconceptions, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions. . . . Our

⁹Ibid., 3.

¹⁰Ibid., 4.

¹¹Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 29. Much of this paper is indebted to the organization of biblical concepts in *The Peacemaker*.

¹²Sande, 31-37.

¹³Bruce Boyd, "Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Seminar on Positive Resolution of Substantive and Interpersonal Conflict in the Hazelton, British Columbia, Seventh-day Adventist Church" (DMin project report, Andrews University, 1995), 1-7; Sande, 30.

differences and preferences, many of which are neither right nor wrong, add immeasurable richness to our human experience. God's breath-taking diversity in creation is a major ingredient in most, if not all conflict.

Misunderstanding of words and intentions is a second basic catalyst of most conflicts. With the complexities of communication, it is surprising that there are not more misunderstandings. During conflicts miscommunication, accidental or intentional, is so common that misunderstandings ought to be expected. Perhaps this is why the apostle James advises that we *be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger* (Jas 1:19). Focused listening and understanding skills are generally more helpful for resolution and reconciliation than powerful logic or persuasive presentations. Noted Mennonite conflict consultant, David Augsburg, underscores the power of careful listening: *Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.*¹⁴ This is especially true during times of conflict.

The third catalyst of human conflict is our basic selfishness, which has continued and darkened since the sin of our first ancestors. Jeremiah suggests that we can barely begin to understand how deeply *deceitful* and *desperately wicked* we are in our innermost selves (Jer 17:9, KJV).¹⁵ The stories of nearly all Bible characters reveal them as selfishly enmeshed in multiple conflicts, often with damaging and even destructive results. Our sinfulness is like a deadly gravity, automatically pulling our conflicts toward disaster (Rom 3:23; 7:14-20).

One of the common places our sinfulness exhibits itself is in the demands we make during conflict. When our desires, even good desires, become demands, they are usually selfish. (Unselfish demands are associated with defending God's reputation or protecting people who are being mistreated.¹⁶) Significantly, it appears to be impossible to become angry unless one or more of our desires have become covert or overt demands. Conflicts are invariably rooted in demands, which are often flagged by words like "ought," "must," and "should." Destructive conflicts are associated with this ordered sequence of verbs: desire, demand, judge, punish.¹⁷ Martha's unhappiness with Mary (Luke 10:40-41) and Joab's murder of Abner and Amasa (2 Sam 3:27; 20:10) are mild and extreme examples of this sequence. Layers of conflict demands

¹⁴David Augsburg, *Caring Enough to Hear* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982), 12.

¹⁵Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 310. Righteous demands are illustrated by the life of Jesus who makes relatively few demands. Jesus dramatically cleanses His Father's dishonored temple (John 2:13-17), He publically levels stern "woes" against Jewish leaders who are smearing God's reputation and abusing their own people (Matthew 23), and when Pharisees will not consider flexing and recalibrating their narrow Sabbath-keeping beliefs and practices to honor God and bless others, Jesus is *grieved* and responds *with anger*. He dramatically opposes them and heals a man's disfigured hand during a Sabbath synagogue worship service (Mark 3:1-6).

¹⁷Sande, 102-109.

can mushroom and fill much of the space in our hearts, space God asks us to reserve for a trusting friendship with Him.¹⁸ In conflict settings it would be best if most of our demands could be returned to their earlier desire form and examined.

Giving God standing “permission” to bring our basic selfishness to mind during conflicts is helpful.

Our sinful tendency is to pin conflict blame to others. Instead, Jesus instructs us to search for and remove *logs* from our eyes so that we can see clearly enough to remove *specks* from our opponents’ eyes (Matt 7:3-5). Reconciliation and conflict resolution are much more likely to occur when we take complete responsibility for our negative attitudes and actions early.

Conflict Issues: Substantive and Interpersonal

Conflicts can orbit around substantive issues, interpersonal issues, or both. Substantive issues, sometimes called material issues, can be phrased as questions that need to be answered before conflict resolution is possible. Among other things, they can involve principles (Paul and the Galatians: *Is a strict keeping of the law the pathway to salvation?*); applications (participants in the Jerusalem Council: *Do Gentiles need to be circumcised in order to become Christians?*); methods (Moses and Zelophehad’s daughters: *Where sons are absent, may daughters inherit property in order to keep it in the family?*); traditions (Jesus and the Pharisees: *Is it permissible to eat food with unwashed hands?*); facts (Aaron and Miriam opposing Moses: *Does God speak only through you, or does He speak through all three of us?*); goals (Joseph’s brothers at the pit: *Shall we let Joseph go free, or shall we get rid of him?*); or rights (prodigal son’s father and older brother: *Is it fair to celebrate the return of the prodigal son?*).

Interpersonal conflict issues are connected to negative feelings and attitudes that conflict participants have toward each other. These could include various combinations of irritation, embarrassment, fear, anger, jealousy, dislike, disdain, disrespect, rejection, judgment, hatred, prejudice, etc. Interpersonal issues can flow from participants’ beliefs that they have been mistreated or from how participants imagine their opponents are viewing them, evaluating them, criticizing them, or planning to mistreat them.

In most conflicts both interpersonal issues and substantive issues are present. Where this is the case, interpersonal issues almost always must be dealt with first for a lasting positive outcome.¹⁹ In other words, healthy interpersonal reconciliation is a prerequisite to wholesome conflict resolution. This fact is of vital importance!

¹⁸David Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 57-94; Sande, 100-116.

¹⁹Sande, 81.

Lost Sons

An excellent example is found in the story of the lost sons of Luke 15. The repentant younger son stumbles home with a genuine, heartfelt confession, and his father runs to offer complete acceptance and forgiveness. Interpersonal issues between them are dealt with, and the substantive issues will obviously be resolved. But later, in a painful exchange between the father and his older son, interpersonal issues remain unresolved. The older brother chooses to argue angrily and bitterly about his rights, while his father pleads for interpersonal reconciliation. We are left with no hint that the older brother moves away from proving his self-righteous substantive positions to sincerely addressing the interpersonal issues that separate him from his brother and father.

Christians in conflict too often mirror the angry older son. Interpersonal issues are frequently ignored or denied while substantive issues get most or all of the attention. This probably happens because interpersonal issues are considered to be sinful. Many of us, including and perhaps especially those with leadership positions, find it difficult to take responsibility for our sinful contributions to the conflict. We protect our reputations and become blind hypocrites. Interpersonal issues are best dealt with before all other considerations through prayerful, humble confession (Prov 28:13; Luke 15:17-21; Jas 5:16), through careful, caring correction (Matt 5:23-24; 18:15-20) and through the miraculous gift of forgiveness (Matt 18:21-35; Eph 4:32).

Overlooked Widows

When interpersonal issues have been dealt, with the way is opened for careful, collaborative negotiation between the reconciled parties. A mutually agreeable and long-lasting resolution of substantive issues becomes far easier to attain. This is what happens in Acts 6:1-6, where the Grecian Christian Jews are deeply offended by the perceived and perhaps actual unfair treatment of their widows by the Hebraic Christian Jews. This conflict appears to be serious enough to have split the early church.

Fortunately, the overworked apostles, who are probably considered to be members of the Hebraic faction, refuse to ignore the conflict or to be insulted. Instead, they deal with it immediately, apparently listening respectfully and carefully without defending themselves. The interpersonal issues are sorted out, and the way opens for resolving the substantive issue: *What is the best way to fairly and consistently meet the needs of our widows?* God inspires his leaders to propose a creative new ministry method for doing His work more effectively. Interestingly, in a huge gesture of trust and goodwill by the Hebraic Christian Jews, all seven members of the new ministry team seem to come from the Grecian faction, as is evidenced by their Greek names. The seven are entrusted with the important task of caring for all Christian widows.

Amazingly, there is unanimous approval from both factions for this solution. Coming out of this conflict, the church is wonderfully united,

energized, and motivated. And at this point many priests, who have been observing the new movement from the outside, are finally convinced of its authenticity and join the increasing flood of new believers.²⁰

A Pauline Approach

It appears that the apostle Paul has the reconciliation of interpersonal issues in mind when he writes these instructions: *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.* (Col 3:12-15, NIV).

Food Offered to Idols

Perhaps a strategy used by Paul in dealing with a conflict over food offered to idols could inform us as we grapple with our conflict over women's ordination. Paul speaks directly to the conflict over food offered to idols in 1 Cor 8 and 10:23-31, and he seems to have it in mind along with other current areas of controversy in Rom 14.²¹ The substantive issue in 1 Cor 8 and 10 asks: *Is it permissible for faithful Christians to eat food which has been offered to idols?*

We need to notice that the major emphasis of Paul's approach is on dealing with the interpersonal or relational issues swirling around this conflict.²² His first objective is that the believers embroiled in this conflict treat each other with the utmost respect and care. Paul opens in 1 Cor 8 by observing that having knowledge ("having the truth," "being right") can be problematic because it is so often associated with arrogance and pride (v. 1). He follows this by reminding his readers that our fullest knowledge is at best only partial (v. 2), implying that all believers, perhaps especially those who consider themselves to be the most knowledgeable, need a large dose of growing humility.

In the related Rom 14 passage Paul warns both those who are opposed to eating food offered to idols, etc., and their opponents who are comfortable eating food offered to idols not to judge each other (vv. 1 and 13). He strongly cautions those in the first group not to be harsh or condemnatory and those in the second group not to be contemptuous or condescending (vv. 3 and 10). Further, he warns both sides to treat the other as family (*brothers*), remembering that God is the only judge and that God will ultimately evaluate

²⁰See par. 3 of the Appendix.

²¹John C. Brunt, *Romans, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier*, ed. George R. Knight (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996), 238; Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, tr. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 178; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans, vol. 2, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 173.

²²Brunt, 237.

each conflict participant by His divine relationship criteria (v. 10). Speaking to both groups, Paul admonishes, *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way* (v. 13). He continues, *we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food* (vv. 19-20).

In 1 Cor 10 Paul continues the discussion of food offered to idols begun earlier in that book. In chapter 8 Paul has clearly addressed the substantive issue by stating his belief that there is absolutely no sound theological argument against eating food offered to idols where believers do not consider it to be an act of worship (vv. 4-8). Picking up on this in chapter 10, he bridges back to the interpersonal issues when he declares, *All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor* (vv. 23-24). Paul’s conflict solution for those who have no guilt eating food offered to idols is to eat it freely with unbelievers and, presumably, with fellow Christians of the same opinion (vv. 25-27). At the same time, he tells them to abstain from eating it when they are with Christians who disagree with them, because of their care and respect for these fellow believers (v. 28, see also 8:4-13; Rom 14:13-15).

Principles and Applications

Interestingly, Paul’s substantive position seems to slant away from the action of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:20), from warnings to the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev 2:14, 20) and perhaps from the stand of Daniel in his conflict with Nebuchadnezzar over the food Daniel was to eat (Dan 1). It is obvious that Paul does not believe his position on food offered to idols is going against any basic Christian principle, just as he does not consider his position on circumcision to cut across such a principle. To him these are clearly areas of application.²³ The book of Acts and Paul’s own writings make it clear that many of his Christian contemporaries disagree with him, considering these to be areas of unchanging principle.

To Paul the wisest applications are flexible, determined by various current factors. In the area of circumcision he frequently deals with Christians who consider the practice necessary for salvation. This belief goes contrary to a universal Christian principle, and here Paul is unequivocal, taking an unbending stand. Yet, in spite of his very strong language on the topic in Galatians and Philippians, Paul does not forbid circumcision, which is an application issue when it is not considered a means to salvation. In one situation, perhaps to avoid criticism and distraction from his mission to share the gospel, Paul has Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

As we have seen in the area of food offered to idols, Paul advocates a split application practice.²⁴ Where people feel that eating food offered to

²³*Principles* are fundamental truths that are always valid in every culture for each person. Because principles are theoretical or abstract by nature, they sometimes need to be interpreted carefully into concrete *applications*.

²⁴A few verses earlier in 1 Cor 9 Paul seems to suggest that best Christian practice

idols is an act of false worship, he states that it should not be eaten. In other places, where people do not consider eating food offered to idols to be an act of worship in any way, Paul advises that it ought to be eaten thankfully without questions (1 Cor 10:25-30). He concludes this section with the well-known admonition: *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ (vv. 31-11:1).*

Toward Resolution

The move toward reconciliation in the SDA context helps us identify principles that are applicable in all Christian communities. When we are ready to deal with this substantive issue, we need to consider some related questions. Is this conflict directly over principle and not application? If principle, which principle or principles? Are some principles subordinate to other principles? Or is this conflict over the application of principle? If this is an application issue, what approach do the times call for? Consider the fact that during his life Paul does not seem to think it is the right time to proclaim freedom for slaves (Eph 6:5-9) even though he pens the ringing words of Gal 3:28. What is currently the best application approach to further the gospel in the various situations in our world field? Does the application need to be the same in every area for every member of a world church? We have seen that there is little, if any, record of Paul taking a universal approach to application situations.

Before and while Christians answer these questions, we could deal with our interpersonal issues. We could allow God's Holy Spirit to remind us that we are family and that those ties are of exceptional importance to Him and to us. As continual recipients of our Father's unselfish kindness and love, we could let the Holy Spirit empower us to respond in kind with supreme love to God and unselfish care for each other. We could ask God to help us see the multiple logs in our eyes before we go after specks. We could repent of and confess uncaring attitudes, demands, and attack words or actions. We could climb down from the soapboxes we love and learn better to listen carefully and caringly to each other. We could give each other the benefit of the doubt and bathe all of our exchanges with a genuine and growing respect. We could

in the application of principle can be exceptionally varied simultaneously in different parts of the world. Paul elevates the value of sharing the gospel above his own rights and freedoms as he explains that his approach is greatly modified by the place where he is working and the company he is keeping. *For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it (vv. 19-23).*

gently confront those we consider to be in error, knowing that we might be wrong because we are fallible. We could accept God's miraculous gift of forgiveness and let Him teach us to forgive others as we wish Him to forgive us. We could be optimistic and expectant during all conflicts, including this one because, while conflicts are often painful, they are opportunities for our Father to teach us things of importance and to grow us in delightful ways to be the people He has designed us to be.

APPENDIX*Excerpt from Ellen White's Letter 29, 1889*

Christ prayed that His disciples might be one, even as He and His Father are one. In what does this unity consist? That oneness does not consist in everyone having the same disposition, the very same temperament, that makes all run in the very same channel. All do not possess the same degree of intelligence. All have not the same experience. In a church there are different gifts and varied experiences. In temporal matters there is a great variety of ways of management, and yet none of these variations in manner of labor, in exercise of gifts, need to create dissension and discord and disunion. One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture is especially appreciated by him because he has seen it in a certain striking light; another sees another portion as very important; and thus one and another presents the very points to the people that appear of highest value. This is all in the order of God. One man blunders in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, but shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same shade of light.

The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord but they cannot quench it and establish a perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect a perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ's school and learn of Christ who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart; and Christ declares that if we learn of Him, then our worries will cease, and we shall find rest to our souls.

The great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When you as individual members of the church love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, then there will be no labored efforts to be in unity; there will be a oneness in Christ, the ears to reports will be closed, and no one will take up a reproach against his neighbor. The members of the church will cherish love and unity and be as one great family. Then we shall bear the credentials to the world that will testify that God has sent His Son into the world. Christ has said, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another." The divinity of Christ is acknowledged in the unity of the children of God. Brethren, when you humble your hearts before God you will see that there is danger of Phariseeism, danger of thinking and praying as did the self-righteous Pharisee. "I thank God that I am not as other men are." Oh, that there may be a breaking up of the fallow ground of the heart, that the seeds of truth may take deep root and spring up and bear much fruit to the glory of God.

Letter 29, 1889. (Written November 8, 1889, from Battle Creek, Michigan, to Brother and Sister Buckner.) *Manuscript Releases*, 15:149-150.