

Reasoning Together

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, [and] easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

As a church we want to have the religion of Christ; we want that religion of compassion that is to be embraced in our relationship with one another in Jesus Christ. The words of this hymn are expressive of this ideal: *The church has one foundation, 'tis Jesus Christ her Lord.* It is where we are all in unity together because we are all looking at the same Jesus and opening our hearts to that same Jesus. And that produces a blessed tie that binds, the Christian love that is generated in the heart of Jesus and is to be extended to each other and through each other.

Splintering Experiences

But the saddest experience that a Christian meets is the one of the time in which we are living now. In today's society, wherever we look, there is splintering and splintering again and again, whether it be in marriage, in the family, or among the nations. Internationally there is no unity. And the saddest of all is that in Christianity, and even in Adventism, there is a splintering into multiple atoms; and this splintering experience is threatening even God's remnant people in the last days. There are many genuine Seventh-day Adventists who, as they try to stand on the original principles of Seventh-day Adventism, are not able to unite. They end up in their little groups, and though they hold certain points of doctrine together with others, there are other points of doctrine that they cannot harmonise on, therefore they move along as little atoms on their own. They are not able to unite, not able to answer the prayer of Jesus "that they all may be one", even as the Father is one with Jesus and Jesus is one with the Father. On one point or another, a beautiful fellowship becomes sullied and muddied.

When we were still in the Reform Movement, we had a beautiful experience there in Perth; the numbers were growing and there was a beautiful, spiritual fellowship. So much so that when the leaders came from interstate, they said, There's something different here. But then it was all shattered. And the sister who was loving the fellowship we were having actually expressed this. We had

an experience like a beautiful crystal vase, she said; we were all together in this beautiful crystal union; but now that crystal vase has been shattered and it's all in bits and pieces and it can't be put together again. A sad reality.

And those who are members of denominational churches, churches with large numbers of people, are only held together by the mere machinery and clubmanship. Yet underneath they also hold differences in their beliefs. It is just one umbrella; just like the papal church, in the same way, becomes an umbrella for many different churches as they all unite together; but they are not in the unity that the prayer of Christ describes.

The world is filled with strife for the supremacy. The spirit of pulling away from fellow laborers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. {9T 257.2}

This was already in Sr. White's time. There in the Adventist church, conflicts were arising already in her time. It's the very air we breathe, she said. And here we are today, over a hundred years from that time, and it is even worse than in Sr. White's time. As we are smothered by the air we breathe, the atmosphere, we are affected by it; and in this smothering atmosphere of strife for the supremacy, of pulling apart from one another, of disorganisation, we are in need of being strongly influenced by an opposite influence. How can we stem the tide of this splintering experience?

I have experienced this over the years in all the different companies that I have been in. Before I came to the Reform Movement, I thought the Reform was the final one and that everything was going to be sweet. It wasn't. Then it continued thereafter. But even before that, I saw it in companies that I was with – it just kept on splintering. When I started to really take an interest as a youth, there were only the two Reform churches, and then only a few little independent movements that could be counted in both hands. But now can you count them? As it says, there are *virgins without number*.

Wisdom Needed

So if we are going to grow together as a church in the prayer of Christ, as a people who are going to stand and not be splintered, we obviously need wisdom, a wisdom that is higher than the one operative in the experiences of the people who profess to be the people of God. This is what the words of James address – the wisdom that is from above. What is the wisdom that we need? We want to explore this in practical reality so that we can embrace it, put it into action, and be drawn together in Christ Jesus.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,

What is the first element of the wisdom that is from above? It *is first pure* – the pure truth, the pure principles of life straight from the word of God. And then it is

James 3:17 ...peaceable, gentle, [and] easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

The wisdom that is from above, to have this in practice so that we have a pure truth, this is what we need. To gain that pure truth, in the development of the early Adventist people, they had to change their views; they had to change their ideas into what God was showing them. They wanted to answer the prayer of Christ. They studied together to come into unity, to have a pure doctrine. But in the process of that, they needed the wisdom that was *peaceable*. Not a conflicting mentality; but a peaceable wisdom. They had to be *gentle* in their engagement with each other. And when one person saw differently to another, by careful, prayerful lovingkindness, if one person discovered that he was wrong, he would be easily entreated. And there would be *mercy, good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*. These were to be practised and that is how the church could come in unity – the wisdom from above.

Let us gaze at length on this wisdom that we may be able to bring this kind of religion of Christ into action. We are confronted by faulty attitudes in human relationships. All of a sudden we discover things, faults that we didn't even know were part of us. Maybe you yourself don't even know certain things about yourself; and you might see them in me, but I can't see them in myself. Or you may not see them, but I can see them. How do we dwell together with all these faulty characteristics? And there may even be some serious errors that someone is holding somewhere, character faults; how do we meet this and stay together? How does God meet it and stays together with us? Interesting meditation. Does God cast us off because of our faults? He stays. We want to study this wisdom that comes from above.

In these manifestations of imperfections in a company of people, if anything is brought to the attention, what is a characteristic that is not the wisdom from above? What is the reaction in each human being when there is a particular thing that they don't even know they have a problem with but which is manifest, and someone touches on it? What are we prone to do? I have to confess that this is natural to all of us, and that includes me. Something is identified, and we look for self-justification somewhere. We think, That's only because of this and that; and this is one of the things that keeps on griping our human interactions. We come to the point where we find an impasse; we cannot pass that conflict, and we judge one another and write each other off because "I

can't dwell with that." "That's too much, I can't cope with that." So what is this wisdom from above? Let us have a look at it.

God Comes to Us

God comes to us and meets us in that position. Let us remember that this is the God who is absolutely pure, who hates sin, and who cannot harmonise with character ugliness. He is pure, He has a perfect character. And here He is, the second person of the Godhead, Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But what did He do?

Philippians 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man,

Now that He was amongst us, as a man with us,

Philippians 2:8 ...he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

What then is the wisdom from above in reference to the God who is so perfect and with us being such a mess of human antagonism? What does it say? He *made Himself of no reputation*, even though He was a holy God, and He took upon Himself *the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man*. What did that mean? He found Himself *in fashion as a man*. He had the same sinful flesh as us; He had sin in the flesh and He had to give us an example of how to deal with that. So He came so close to us. As the Spirit of Prophecy tells us, the sinful thoughts, the sinful ways of men, bruised His soul. He felt it. This is the wisdom from above. It is *pure*; but what else is it? *Peaceable, easy to be entreated*; it comes along and touches us and does not separate from us, but instead comes close to us.

[Christ] did not humble the truth to meet man in his fallen condition, and lower the standard of righteousness to suit his degradation; {RH, August 6, 1895 par. 3}

This is a wisdom that we want to understand. He did not humble the truth; He continued to uphold the standard of righteousness, instead of letting it come down to the level of our poor standards of unrighteousness.

...but he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, in order that he might save the race that had been degraded by transgression. {Ibid.}

He did not humble the truth, but what did He do? *He humbled Himself*. Here we see the wisdom from above. How to interact with each other by learning it from Jesus. Don't change the truth; hold on to the truth. The wisdom from above is first pure – absolute truth. But humble *yourself*. This is an interesting exercise. He came to man as one with him. He was in fashion as a man.

Ezekiel 33:10 Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins [be] upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

This is the position that the Son of God came and took. He humbled Himself and suffered under the transgressions and sins that are upon us; and He was obedient to that, even unto the death of the cross. He pined away in that as a human being. He came to man as one with him. And being one with him, the appeal is the following scripture. There is no condemnation by God's attitude that He is revealing to us here. He comes to us as one of us, and here you are in this deplorable condition, sin-sick from the head to the foot, and He says:

Come, Let Us Reason Together

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

The wisdom that is from above comes close to us, takes all of our sins upon Himself, and then says, Come on now, I am one with you; let's reason together. This is the wisdom from above: "Let us reason together. I am one with you; I am suffering as you suffer. And as I am one with you and you are one with me, although you are suffering together with me because of the sins, and thinking, How can we ever be saved? I am telling you that no matter what your sins are like; if they *be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool*. We can do it together. Come on, come now. Let's reason together." This is the wisdom from high.

Then, not only does He follow this through, but He calls us:

Micah 6:1 Hear ye now what the LORD saith; Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.

He says: Are you listening to Me? What am I saying to you? This is the Lord speaking. This is not any human ideas.

Micah 6:2 Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel. 3 O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

Are you picking up on the wisdom that comes from above? He has humbled Himself; He has taken upon Himself the human frailty and sin, and He appeals and says, "Come, we will work it out together. But now you have struggles, you have your opinions and your strong suggestions; come on, let's argue it out together. Come to the mountain." This always captivates me. I've been among this high Alps of New Zealand, and you feel humbled as these towering mountains are all around you. I was in the valley near the Homer Tunnel in the South Island, and it is scary. You can hear rocks rumbling down the sides of the mountains, and you think, This is dangerous. And God is saying, *Contend thou before the mountains*. Argue with the mountain.

Micah 6:1 ...Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.

Like shouting at the mountains, Hey! This is the sort of humbling experience that is portrayed here. And then He says, "Look, if you have a controversy with Me, I am a mountain, I am the immovable God; but look what I have done for you. I have come along and been part of you, and I have died with your sins. What have I done? *Wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against Me.*" As we behold this attitude, one who is willing to have dialogue with those who are in controversy with Him, what does it do to us? Do we suffer controversy among people? The attitude of God, the wisdom that comes from above, is to say, What have I done? His attitude is one of being willing to have dialogue even if it may be uncomfortable. In His experience the grievances of the human sinfulness were opened up and it wounded Him. So there is this attitude that stands here for us to expose our hearts to, because this is something that is so poorly understood.

It is most difficult, even for those who claim to be followers of Jesus, to forgive as Christ forgives us. The true spirit of forgiveness is so little practiced, and so many interpretations are placed upon Christ's requirement, that its force and beauty are lost sight of. We have very uncertain views of the great mercy and loving-kindness of God. He is full of compassion and forgiveness, and freely pardons when we truly repent and confess our sins. {TMK 180.2}

This is why He came close to us; this is the wisdom from above; and it is so poorly understood. This is why the splinterings keep on going.

The Lord requires of us the same treatment toward His followers that we receive of Him. {TMK 180.4}

Are you picking up the answer to staying together in unity? Jesus is giving us this because His religion is a religion of compassion. He forgives, and He wants to reason with those who argue against Him even though He is so perfect.

We are to exercise patience, to be kind even though they do not meet our expectations in every particular. {Ibid.}

Isn't that what Jesus was? He was kind even though people didn't meet the expectations He had in every particular.

Christ did not say, You may tolerate your neighbor, but, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." {Ibid.}

Jesus gave that example as well. As it is written then in Philippians 2, *Let this mind be in you. Come now, let us reason together*, says the Lord. And in our reasoning together with Him let us keep in view the wisdom of compassion, patience, kindness all the way through, the attitude of God.

Dealing with Sin in the Church

Now if there is something that is severely wrong in the church, what are we admonished to do, and how are we admonished to do it? We now come to the well-known scripture that is often laid out before the sinner in the church, by way of saying, You've got to listen to us. Matthew 18 is the scriptural procedure, and so people follow the legalistic procedure of this:

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 a heathen man and a publican.

So this is read and this is put into practice to try and keep the church pure. But remembering the religion of compassion, how should this be practiced? How is this to be dealt with in a church with faulty, sinful people?

Galatians 6:1 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. 2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Who is to do this? *Ye which are spiritual.* This is what is behind the method that Jesus talks about; this is the Bible rule: going to a person and *restoring* them. Not just telling them, This is what you're doing, etc. and then leaving them to it. No. *In the spirit of meekness go and restore.* And if the person is not going to heed you, go with two to *restore*, over a period of time! Patiently here. And then, with the love and the compassion of Jesus, if there is still a long period of time given for this repentance, bring him to the church and try to *restore!* not censure. This is the religion of Christ. This is "Come, let us reason together with all who are faulty and sinful."

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

This is the guidance and the instruction. This is what we are called to do, instead of one person coming there and saying, Well, I'm not a sinner like you; you better come right here. This is a spirit of thing. There is to be nothing like that. Esteem the other better than you. Consider thyself, lest thou be tempted, because you are in no better a position than the person who fell in the temptation. You can fall too. This is the attitude; this is the wisdom from above. *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

Jesus, who died for us, loves us with a love that is infinite; {RH, April 22, 1884 par. 9}

What does that mean? Infinity. There is no end to it.

...and we must love one another. We must put away all selfishness, and work together in love and unity. We have loved and petted ourselves, and excused ourselves in our waywardness; but we have been unmerciful toward our brethren, who are not as faulty as ourselves. The Lord loves us, and bears with us, even when we are ungrateful to him, forgetful of his mercies, wickedly unbelieving; {Ibid.}

What a statement.

...but consider, brethren, how relentless we are to one another, how pitiless; how we hurt and wound one another when we should love as Christ has loved us. Let us make a complete change. Let us cultivate the precious plant of love, and delight to help one another. We must be kind, forbearing, pa-

tient with one another's errors; we must keep our sharp criticisms for ourselves, but hope all things, believe all things, of our brethren. {Ibid.}

O to put that into practice. Can you see? The wisdom from above will keep God's people in unity if this is practised. This is the counsel; this is what we are meant to be doing. This is the wisdom of God, this is truth.

Easy to Be Entreated

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

That statement, in conjunction with the other inspired words that we have read, prevents people from ruling over each other. It teaches them to esteem each other higher than themselves, realising their own sinfulness that they are guilty of; and this makes them patient and kind with others, and to realise the patience that God has dealt with them in their situation, so that they then will treat each other the same way. This is the religion of Christ.

As we counsel with each other, as we come and reason together, as Jesus did, when it comes to certain issues that we need to face, we are to give way to each other, respecting one another's individuality. Sister White here describes people who have strong views and ideas, and who push their ideas strongly upon others:

They will be exacting, and will seek to enforce rigorous duties, and go to great lengths in matters of minor importance, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law--judgment and mercy and the love of God. {MM 269.2}

What are the weightier matters? *Judgment, mercy, and the love of God.*

Through the work of a few of this class of persons, the whole body of Sabbath keepers will be designated as bigoted, pharisaical, and fanatical. The work of the truth, because of these workers, will be thought to be unworthy of notice. {Ibid.}

These are “*people of narrow minds, who are critical and sharp, and very tenacious in holding their own conceptions of what the truth means.*” So you can assume to keep a pure doctrine and yet become bigoted and harsh and hold on to certain ideas that make it impossible for us to stay together. Therefore we must give in to each other instead of exacting our own strong opinions. We should be concentrating on the judgment of God, the mercy, and the love of God. And it is the

truth, the pure truth, the pure doctrines, that are we are to concentrate on, the weightier matters.

Keeping Minor Points in the Background

There are the main pillars of our faith, subjects which are of vital interest, the Sabbath, the keeping of the commandments of God. Speculative ideas should not be agitated; {CW 77.1}

This is how in the past experience of my life in the ministry and amongst different churches things have gone wrong. Speculative ideas become agitated, and this is wrong;

...for there are peculiar minds that love to get some point that others do not accept, and argue and attract everything to that one point, urging that point, magnifying that point, when it is really a matter which is not of vital importance, and will be understood differently. {Ibid.}

Now we are seeing something. We have to accept that certain things will be understood differently by each other in certain little areas. Don't make it a point of contention.

Twice I have been shown that everything of a character to cause our brethren to be diverted from the very points now essential for this time, should be kept in the background. {Ibid.}

Interesting. Here we have some beautiful counsel – the wisdom from above. And the compassion and love one for another is to be sustained in all of our discussion, whether it be in the home, in the church, between husband and wives, or in the family. We are to practice these principles, because they are the wisdom from above that will keep us together.

If we enter the mind of God, all the subjects that He in His counsel holds before us (not the minor points but the important things), His uniting power will hold us in blessed unity. He will do this. So we are to cast out distrust and all human gremlins between each other. Cast them away; they are not to interfere with our unity. Let nothing fester and develop a schism; nothing. As it comes to your attention, follow and practice the wisdom from above; and we can then continue to be in unity, without making issues that are really of no vital importance something that should segregate us in our attitudes toward one another. And if there is something that has been permitted to cause a fester, what are we to do? Go quickly to clear the problem.

James 5:16 Confess [your] faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

What are we to do? Confess our faults one to another. I am not to confess *your* faults one to another, but *my* faults. If we have done something to cause the suffering of another person, confess those faults, say what it is, and ask for forgiveness; and then *pray one for another*. If this is practised, then the unity and the wisdom of heaven will produce a joyful fellowship. That which we had dreamed would be our experience will not be shattered anymore, as that vase of relationships was shattered. We will enjoy the unity of heaven, a joyful fellowship which will contrast with the rest of the church and the rest of the world; a company that can be recognised, as Jesus said. When people see the love one to another they will be convinced.

May God help us to truly embrace this and make our unity obvious to a world that is shattered wherever we look.

Amen.