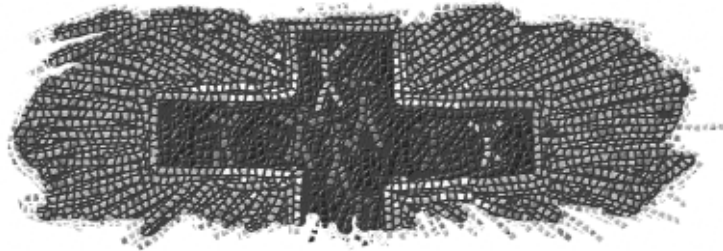


Unity Within Differences



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 12

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31; Ephesians 4:1-16.

MEMORY VERSE: “There is one body. There is one [Holy] Spirit. You were appointed [chosen] to one hope when you were chosen [by God]. There is one Lord. There is one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all. He is over everything. He is through everything. He is in everything” (Ephesians 4:4-6, NIV).

WE HAVE REACHED THE HALFWAY POINT of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 1, 2, and 3 discuss Christian unity. Christian unity overcomes anything that divides people. Ephesians 4, 5, and 6 discuss the useful results of Christian unity in the life of a Christian. So Paul moves from deep study to practice and from discussion to advice and encouragement. He also moves from what God has done for us to what we should do because of what God has done for us. Bible study must make a difference in how we live. How we live must make a difference in how we study the Bible.

Paul turns his attention to the kind of life believers should live according to the mystery of Christ. The Jew/Gentile¹ unity is no fairy tale. Instead, it requires a “life worthy of what God chose you for” (Ephesians 4:1, NIV).

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Why does Paul tell us to walk worthy of our calling? What does that mean? What kind of differences will there be within the unity of God's church? What are the gifts given to individuals (persons) in the church? How does Paul describe growth in Christ?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 19.

¹Gentile—a person who is not a Jew.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 13**WALKING WORTHY
(Ephesians 4:1-3).**

In Ephesians 1, 2, and 3, Paul talks about what God has done for us in Christ. In Ephesians 4, he tells us to “walk worthy” of our beliefs. He also tells us how we should “walk worthy.” What are the five graces necessary for Christian character? What is your understanding of each one? Ephesians 4:2, 3. Compare² what you wrote to what the rest of today’s lesson says.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Lowliness or humbleness. The Romans and Greeks thought that being humble was being weak. But to the Christian, humbleness is a sign of strength. Humbleness is the opposite of pride. Pride causes disunity. Lucifer was proud. Read Ezekiel 28:1-19. But being humble is necessary to being restored³ to God. Christ showed humbleness when He became human and died on the cross.

Gentleness or meekness (humbleness) is necessary to the unity of the church. Meekness does not fight back even in the face of trouble. In the end, people who are meek will inherit (receive) the earth (Matthew 5:5).

Patience or long-suffering is part of God’s character. He is “patient with you. He doesn’t [does not] want anyone to be destroyed. Instead, he wants all people to turn away from their sins” (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). Patience means continuing bravely in the face of suffering. Patience is refusing to pay back wrongs. Patience is always hoping that broken relationships will be restored.

“Bearing with one another” (Ephesians 4:2, NKJV) means more than being patient with one another. It means understanding the other person and being willing to forgive and accept one another.

All these graces come from love. All the graces are the active practice of love that saves relationships and

²compare—to show how things are the same.

³restored—to make something as it was before it was broken.

encourages peace and unity in the church and outside of the church.

Humbleness, gentleness, long-suffering, bearing with one another, and love! How well did you show these things during the past week? If there was something you could do over again, what would it be? How can you not make the same mistake again?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 14

WHY UNITY (Ephesians 4:4-6)?

What is the important theme in Ephesians 4:4-6?

Ephesians 4:4-6 are some of the most beautiful verses in the Bible. How these verses are written is beautiful. How these verses describe unity in the fullness of the Godhead is unbelievable. Should anyone be brave to ask, “Why should Christians be one?” If so the answer is, “Because everything about the Christian faith and life is one.”

God has commanded and blessed the unity of the Christian body. *One God* through *one Christ* has rescued us from sin. *One God* through *one Christ* has given us one faith. *One God* through *one Christ* has given us re-birth through *one Holy Spirit*. *One God* through *one Christ* has made us

members of *one body* through *one baptism*, and has given to us *one eternal*⁴ *hope*.

As we study God’s plan for unity, we need to know one more important point. All members of the Godhead⁵ are involved in the unity of the church. Ephesians often points to the Godhead’s work in rescuing people from sin:

1. *God the Father*—“who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6, NKJV). He is all in all.

2. *God the Son*—“the author and perfecter [finisher] of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV), “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27), and the Foundation of the church. The church is His body.

3. *God the Holy Spirit*—God’s Helper in our new birth experience. The new birth experience leads us to baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13).



All members of the Godhead are involved in the unity of the church.

⁴eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

⁵Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

“In Ephesians 4, God’s plan is so clearly and simply shown that all His children may understand and accept His plan. His plan is the method He has chosen to keep unity in His church. In this way, its members may show the world a healthy religious experience.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1117.

The famous evangelist⁶ Dwight L. Moody said, “Satan separates. God unites. Love keeps us together.” No one would like to be a tool of Satan. All of us would like to be tools of God’s love. How do the five graces in yesterday’s lesson help to unite the church?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 15

UNITY: DIFFERENT GIFTS (Ephesians 4:7-11; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31).

Ephesians 4:6 speaks of God as the “Father of all. He is over everything. He is through everything. He is in everything” (Nlrv). The point is, we all have the same Father. Having the same Father shows the unity of the church. In Ephesians 4:7, Paul says that “each one of us has received a gift of grace, just as Christ wanted us to have it” (Nlrv). This does not mean that everyone receives the same

gifts. And they have not received their gifts in the same measure (Ephesians 4:11). Paul turns from “all of us” (Ephesians 4:6) to “each one of us” (Ephesians 4:7). In the same way, he turns from unity to diversity (differences) in the church. Diversity does not mean division (splitting apart). Diversity means there are different gifts. These gifts should be used for the unity of the church. The same Holy Spirit gives the gifts and helps us work together to strengthen and build God’s church.

What is Paul teaching us in Ephesians 4:7-11? How do these words help us understand the gifts God has given us?

“When he [Christ] went up to his place on high” (Ephesians 4:8, Nlrv), He gave gifts to the believers. That means when Christ went to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on His church. But how do we understand Ephesians 4:9, where Paul states: “He also first descended [went down] into the lower parts of the earth” (NKJV)? The difference between ascended (went up) and descended (went down) is not about space. It is about what Christ did for us. Christ went up to the presence of God where He was honored. But He also went down to the lowest level of humbleness when He died for us on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11). The victory in going down and the joy of going

⁶evangelist—a preacher who travels to preach the gospel.

up are celebrated by the giving of the gifts to church members whom Christ has rescued from Satan. Satan is the prince of darkness. By Christ's victory over Satan, and by His going up "higher than all the heavens" (Ephesians 4:10, NIV), Christ fills all things. He is Lord of the universe. But He is still closely tied with the church on earth and fills the church with His gifts.



The lowest level of humbleness.

Name the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11. Compare these with the gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28-31. What does Paul say about the nature and use of gifts? What gifts has Christ given you? How have you been using these gifts? What useful ways can you better use your gifts?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 16

UNITY: EQUIPPED⁷ FOR GOD'S WORK (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

We have been studying the gifts Christ has given His church. What two reasons does Paul give for these gifts? Ephesians 4:12. How do these reasons relate to each other?

The first reason deals with "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry"⁸ (NKJV). The Greek word for "equipping" comes from a word that means "to put right," such as mending (fixing) a torn fishing net (Matthew 4:21) or setting a broken bone. So the equipping of the saints means to prepare, train, and make them ready to work for God.

This raises the question: Who are the ministers of the church? According to the New Testament, all Christians are ministers. Christ Himself has commanded all Christians to go, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach (Matthew 28:18-20). God's work is not reserved for a chosen few pastors. God's work is for all who follow Christ. God's work is a people-to-people, one-to-one, work. No church member can escape the responsibility of working for God. No pastor can claim special rights in working for God.

⁷equipped—to be given supplies to do a certain work.

⁸ministry—God's work.



Every member of the church is a minister.

The second reason for the giving of the gifts is “for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12, NKJV). We are not to use the gifts for selfish reasons. The gifts are for the good of the church and for the growth of the church. People who use their gifts selfishly will lose their gifts (Matthew 25:24-30). The church can grow only when its members love and care for one another. Together, members can reach out to the neighboring community with the grace and love of Christ. When all church members use their gifts unselfishly, the whole world will hear the gospel sooner. In this way, the church will use “the unity of the faith,” and will receive the “fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, NKJV). A person filled with Christ cannot remain silent when people in the world are without Christ. Sharing Christ with others is why we work for Him.

Imagine what your local church would be like if each member were using his or her gifts to share the gospel. What can you do to use your gifts? How can you help others use their gifts?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 17

UNITY: GROWING UP IN CHRIST (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Ephesians 4:12, 13 says that the spiritual gifts are given to equip (prepare) the saints for the work of the church. The gifts also lead the saints to “grow up in the faith” and to “receive everything Christ has for us” (NirV). Coming to Christ, experiencing church unity, and being equipped to work for Christ are not enough. We must grow in Christ. (Ephesians 4:14-16 list signs of growth in Christ. Ephesians 4:17-32 explain this growth. We will study Ephesians 4:17-32 next week.)

Ephesians 4:14 says we “will no longer be babies in the faith” (NirV). How do we understand this with Christ’s words in Matthew 18:3?

God wants us to be childlike but not to act as children. He expects us to “put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11). He wants us to show the maturity of adulthood. As adults, we can separate spiritual things from worldly things. We can eat solid food instead of only milk (1 Corinthians 3:2).

What else is Paul warning us about in Ephesians 4:14? How well have you done in this area?

Being strong in Christ depends on how faithful we are to our beliefs, or how we separate truth from error, and how we are not deceived by people

who claim to have the truth. Being strong in Christ requires knowing the Bible so well that when “cleverness,” “tricks,” and “evil plans” (Ephesians 4:14, NIV) challenge us, we will stand strong on the Bible (Isaiah 8:20).

Paul also talks about “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). This means doing the truth, and doing the truth in love. The church must tell the difference between the gospel and false teachings. But even here, truth must put on love. “Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love. Love becomes soft if it is not made strong by truth.”—Adapted from John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 172.

Finally, the greatest sign of growth is complete loyalty and obedience to Christ. The church is His body. Every part and work of the body must be connected with and in Christ.

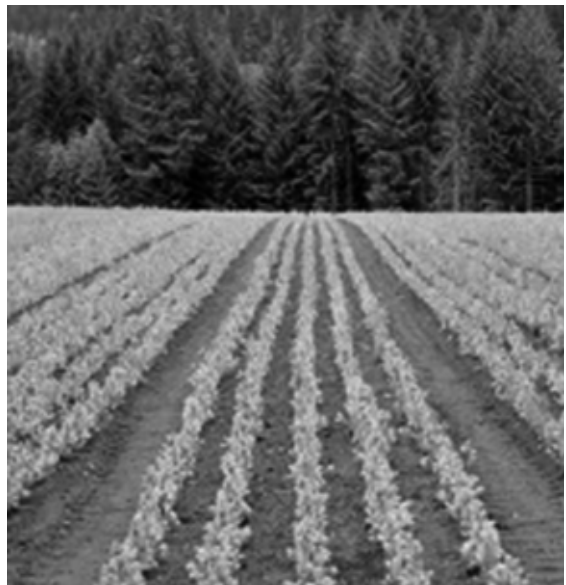
Is truth still truth even if spoken rudely? Defend your answer.

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 18

ADDITIONAL STUDY: *Spiritual gifts:* “Without the Holy Spirit’s leading, the gospel work is powerless. A person may have education, talents, good speech, every natural or developed gift. But without the Holy Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner will be won to Christ. However, if Christians are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Holy Spirit are theirs, the poorest and least able of His disciples will have a power that will influ-

ence hearts. God makes them open to the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s [Jesus] Object Lessons*, p. 328.

Christian growth: “The germination (awakening) of the seed represents the beginning of the spiritual life. The development of the plant is a beautiful example of Christian growth. As in nature, so in grace. There can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. The plant’s growth is silent and unseen, but continuous. So is the development of the Christian life. At every part of development (growth), our life may be perfect. But if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual growth. . . . We shall grow strong to accept responsibility. And our privileges (rights) will depend on how much we have grown in Christ.”—Adapted from *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 65, 66.



Let us grow as Christians as the plants of the ground.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss in class the question asked at the end of Thursday's lesson.
2. Discuss the second quote above. What does it mean that at every part of development we may be perfect?
3. Read again Ephesians 4:14. How

important is pure doctrine⁹ to Paul? As a class, talk about how much importance should be placed (put) on doctrine. How might we be guilty of teaching too much or too little doctrine?

4. How would you answer someone who asks, "How do I discover what my spiritual gifts are?"

⁹doctrine—church belief.