

The Secret to Our Success in Joining as One in Jesus



SABBATH—OCTOBER 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 1:3–14; Ephesians 2:11–22; Ephesians 4:1–3; Ephesians 5:15–21.

MEMORY VERSE: “He [God] let us know his secret plan. This was what God wanted, and he planned to do it through [by] Christ. God’s goal [what God wanted to do] was to finish his plan when the right time came. He planned that all things in heaven and on earth be joined together with Christ as the head” (Ephesians 1:9, 10, ERV).

EPHESUS was an important city for buying and selling things in Asia Minor. Asia Minor is part of modern Turkey today. The church in Ephesus had Jewish and non-Jewish members. Church members came from different social groups. Did the Ephesian church have a lot of problems because it was made of many different groups of people? Not at all. The members understood they were all part of one “body”—Jesus. Jesus joined them together in unity. Unity is agreement.

For Paul, the meaning of unity had two parts. First, Paul believed in unity in the church. The church joined Jews and non-Jews in one body: Jesus. Second, Paul believed in unity in heaven and earth. Jesus is the reason for the unity that both heaven and earth experience.

Paul uses the words “in Christ” or “with Christ” many times in his letters to show us everything that God did to join heaven and earth in agreement and what He plans to do. God plans to bring all things in heaven and on earth into agreement again. This unity will happen only after Jesus comes back.



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GOD GIVES US SPECIAL GIFTS (Ephesians 1:3–14)

In Ephesians 1:3–14, Paul lists many special gifts that God gives us because of Jesus. What gifts are they?

Jesus' followers have many reasons to thank God. Because of Jesus, God gives us many gifts. One of those gifts is adoption. God adopts us as His children. Paul uses the idea of our adoption into God's family as a word picture to help explain unity. You will remember that unity is agreement. It means that Jesus makes church members the same in heart, mind, and belief. God adopted us as His children because of Jesus. Now we belong to God's family. The word picture of the family also helps us remember God's Special Agreement with Israel.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul also talks about non-Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Messiah is the Savior that God chose to free His people from sin. Non-Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah are God's children. That means that the promises that God gave Israel in His Special Agreement belong to the non-Jews too (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7). When we understand that the non-Jews are a part of God's Special Agreement, then we will understand more about unity or agreement. Paul's words in Ephesians 1:3–14 show us that God already planned for all humans to join as one in Jesus. As part of God's family, we are not better than other people because we know Jesus. No. God loves each one of us the same.

Now, let us be clear about Ephesians 1:3–14. This verse can be confusing to some people. Do you see where Paul says, "God chose us to belong to Christ before the world [earth] was created [made]" (Ephesians 1:4, NIV)? This verse is a promise. God promised to save us before He made the earth. Does this verse also say that God chose some to be saved and some to be lost? No, the Bible does not teach that! In this verse, Paul says that God made a plan to save us before He made the earth. God made that plan because He wanted everyone to have the same chance to be saved (John 3:16; read also 1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Peter 3:9). God knows ahead of time who will accept His gift of being saved. But God's knowing our answer is **not** the same thing as His deciding ahead of time who will be saved and who will be lost. God offers to save everyone because Jesus died for us. The question is: What will we say to God's offer? God does not force anyone to accept His gift.



God adopts us as His children because of Jesus. Now we belong to God's family.

JESUS' DEATH BROKE THE "WALL" (Ephesians 2:11–22)

Race and religion can cause some of the biggest separations between people. In many countries, people must carry special cards known as identity (ID) cards. These ID cards show basic personal information. The cards may tell you the race group or religion a person belongs to. Often, people who belong to a small religion or race group with no power cannot own or do some of the things that other people can own or do. When wars start, people in power can use the information on these ID cards to hurt people because they do not belong to the accepted religion or race groups.

In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul tells us about the best behavior for the Christian community. What behavior is that? How does our being joined together in agreement in Jesus help us solve our differences? Jesus' death on the cross "broke" something. What did His death destroy?

Paul asks the Ephesians to remember that their lives were awful before God gave them His grace. Grace is God's gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. In the past, differences in religion and race caused disagreement and wars between people. But the Good News for us is that Jesus joins us together as one people (Ephesians 2:13).

In Paul's day, there is a big space outside the temple in Jerusalem. This space is named the temple court. The temple court is divided into smaller spaces, also named courts, for Jews and non-Jews. The court for Jews is closer to the temple building. This court is separated from the court of the non-Jews by a wall. The wall has a sign with words that warn foreigners not to go in. If they do enter, they shall die. The Jews in Jerusalem blame Paul for breaking this rule. The Jews blame Paul for bringing a non-Jew into the Jewish part of the temple. This non-Jew is a man named Trophimus from Ephesus (Acts 21:29). So, Paul is arrested. But in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul says, "Christ [Jesus] made both Jews and non-Jews one people. They were separated as if there were a wall between them. But Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body" (Ephesians 2:14, ICB). Because of Jesus, we are also Abraham's sons and daughters who can serve God.

How have Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11–22 come true in our church? What more must we do to make them come true?



“But Christ broke down that wall of hate by giving his own body” (Ephesians 2:14, ICB).

AGREEMENT IN THE CHURCH (Ephesians 4:1–3)

Paul gives the Ephesians examples about how they can use his advice in their lives every day. Paul's advice about how to have agreement in the church is not simply a fake story or idea. No, the agreement is very real for the church among all Jews, non-Jews, and people of different colors and ways of life. But if we want to have agreement in the church, then Paul says we must "live the way God's people should live, because he [God] chose you to be his" (Ephesians 4:1, ERV).

In Ephesians 4:1–3, Paul talks about how we as Christians should behave because God chose us to be His children. How does Paul say we should behave?

Paul tells us that we should be kind and gentle. We should be loving and not have pride. Then we will have peace. "The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain [stay] as one [in agreement]. Let peace keep you together" (Ephesians 4:3, NIV). Love helps peace to grow in the church and outside it. When we are at peace with each other, then we show other people God's love in special ways. God asks the church to be His witness. He wants the church to be a witness for Him, even in the worst of times.

Paul talks about an important idea in Ephesians 4:4–6. What idea does Paul talk about?

In the first verses of Ephesians 4, Paul talks about how much he wants church members to be in agreement. Paul begs the Ephesians to show unity (Ephesians 4:1–3). Remember, unity is agreement. It means church members are joined together in one mind, heart, and belief in Jesus. Then Paul makes a list of the seven things that join believers as one in Jesus (Ephesians 4:4–6). Paul tells us that unity, or agreement, is something that believers already have (Ephesians 4:4–6). At the same time, believers must work all the time to make sure they keep their unity strong (Ephesians 4:1–3). Believers also need to think of ways to have more unity in the future (Ephesians 4:13).

God chose us to be His people. What choices can we make now to "live the way God's people should live"?



Love helps peace to grow in the church and outside it.

CHURCH LEADERS AND AGREEMENT (Ephesians 4:11)

“But each one of us has received a gift of grace [loving-favor]. These gifts are given to us by Christ” (Ephesians 4:7, NIV). Yes, God gives the gift of being saved to anyone who will accept it. But there are special spiritual gifts that God gives to some of His servants so that they can do important work for Him.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul talks about the gifts of leadership that God gives to the church. What are these different gifts named?

In Ephesians 4:12, Paul tells us why God gives these gifts of leadership to the church. Why does God give leadership gifts to the church?

All Christians, in some ways, are pastors and God’s servants who share the Good News about Jesus. Jesus’ Important Command in Matthew 28:19, 20 is not only for church leaders. Jesus gave His Important Command to all Christians. He told believers to go and make new followers from all the people on the earth. He told His followers to baptize people and to teach. God does not give work only to pastors to do. God gives special work to every Christian. God wants all of us to help share the Good News. No church leader can say that he or she is the only worker God gave work to. God gave the spiritual gifts of leadership to the church for very important reasons. God wanted these gifts to improve the church and give the church knowledge about right and wrong. Church leaders must use these gifts to help peace and agreement to grow in the church.

Paul’s list of leadership gifts tells us that God gave the church these gifts to help believers find people who do not know Jesus. God chooses some people in the church to help other members do their work for God, to serve Jesus, and to teach and lift up the “body” of Jesus, or His church (Ephesians 4:12). Jesus gave us a perfect example of leadership. His example must guide us in the work we do for God. Jesus came to serve other people (Matthew 20:25–28). We must do the same thing that Jesus did. We must work together with other believers to do God’s work.

What are your spiritual gifts? How are you using your gifts to bring peace to your local church?



Jesus told His followers to baptize people and to teach.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS (Ephesians 5:15–21)

Christianity is more than ideas and teachings. Christianity is about how we become friends with other people and with God. Our connection to God changes the connections we have with other people. The ideas about agreement and peace that Paul talks about in his letter to the Ephesians can help us become better friends with other people and each other.

Read Ephesians 5:15–21. What does Paul tell us to do in verse 21? How is “serv[ing] each other” (ERV) connected with our having peace?

Paul tells believers to serve each other. Paul connects this command in verse 21 with the command for Christians to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18, NIV). How do we show that we are filled with the Holy Spirit? We show that we are filled with the Spirit when we serve and listen to each other. God wants us to love and serve people. Of course, we cannot feel this way about people on our own. We need the Holy Spirit’s help. When we serve other people, we show them that the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts. He gives us the power to serve other people. The Holy Spirit helps connect us to other people in agreement. When we serve people, we also show them how much we love Jesus for dying for our sins.

In Ephesians 5:22–6:9, Paul talks about the power we have to change the lives of the people we serve at home and work. What power do we have to make their lives better?

It is true that agreement in the church depends on the agreement found in the home. Paul said that the agreement, love, and respect between a husband and wife will show people Jesus’ love for the church. Jesus gave up everything to save us because He loved us. So, we need to show Jesus’ love and respect to everyone in our homes and in our churches. We need to show Jesus’ love in our connections with our children and with our bosses and everyone at work. The peace we enjoy at home needs to fill our church life.

What important rules did you learn from the verses that we studied today? How can they help you love and serve people better in your family and at work?



We show that we are filled with the Spirit when we serve and listen to each other.

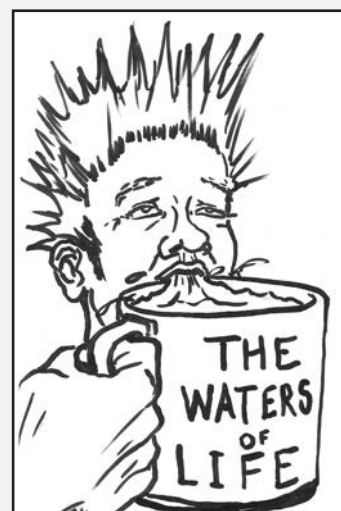
ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Spirit of Unity [peace and agreement],” pages 179–188, in *Testimonies [special messages] for the Church*, volume 9.

“Jesus did not favor any person because of his or her race group, power, or belief. But Israel’s holy leaders wanted every good thing they could get from God only for themselves and for their country. They wanted all the gifts of heaven for themselves. They did not want God to give these gifts to other people on the earth. But Jesus came to break every wall. He came to show us that His gift of mercy and love were the same as the air, the light, or the rain. They are for everyone.

“Jesus started a religion that was the same as the life He lived. He started a religion with no social groups that have more power than other groups. He started a religion that connected Jews to non-Jews and free persons to slaves. Jesus made them all brothers. He made them equal in God’s eyes. Jesus did not do anything to get money or power. Everyone was the same in God’s view: neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies alike. What did Jesus want more than anything and with all His heart? He wanted and loved the person who ‘thirsted’ for the waters of life.”
—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [special messages] for the Church*, volume 9, pages 190, 191, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What do you see in Ephesians 4 that shows us the peace and agreement in the church that God wants us to have? What can we do to make sure that we have this peace and agreement?
- 2 If we want to have peace and agreement in the church, then we must be willing to serve other people. Without this spirit of love, there can be no peace or agreement in the church. If we are proud, if we think we are always right, if we are unwilling to listen to others, then we have no chance for peace and agreement. How can we learn to be willing to serve other people?
- 3 How can we have peace and agreement in the church, even when we do not always agree with each other on everything?



“What did Jesus want more than anything and with all His heart? He wanted and loved the person who ‘thirsted’ for the waters of life.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [special messages] for the Church*, volume 9, page 191, adapted.