

The Holy Spirit and the Church



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Ephesians 1:22, 23; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3–7; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 4:5, 6; Acts 2:4–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together. There is one body. There is one Spirit. You were appointed to [established in; set up for] one hope when you were chosen. There is one Lord. There is one faith and one baptism” (Ephesians 4:3–5, NIV).

SOMETIMES WE THINK THE HOLY SPIRIT works in the life of only one person at a time. Yes, the Holy Spirit does work in individual lives. And these believers are the foundation of a spiritual community. But the Holy Spirit also is responsible for the life of the church of Christ.

We often think that the church lives and grows because of what we do for God. But the church is alive because of what God has already done for us through the Holy Spirit. And the church is alive because of what God continues to do through His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit creates a spiritual community and fellowship in the church. The foundation of the church's authority is the Bible. But the Holy Spirit inspired (led) men to write the Bible. And that same Spirit leads men to live their lives by the Bible. The Bible is the foundation for the oneness of faith in the church. There would not be a church without the work of the Spirit. Without the Spirit, the church could not spread the good news to the world.

**THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES US ONE WITH CHRIST
(1 Peter 2:6, 7)**

The Holy Spirit makes us one in many ways. The Holy Spirit first makes us one with Christ. That oneness is the reason why there is a church. Christ, then, is the Head of the church (read Ephesians 1:22, 23 and Ephesians 5:23). And the Holy Spirit helps us to be joined as one to Christ Himself.

Being one with Christ is the beginning of all the blessings of salvation. This is because all we have in the Lord comes from the Holy Spirit. For one, our oneness with Christ makes us the sons and daughters of God. For another, our cleansing and forgiveness come from being one with Jesus. And being one with Him makes us holy. It gives us the power over sin.

Our bodies and our natures will go through a change at the Second Coming. This change will be a result of our being one with Christ. So, Jesus must be the foundation to our whole Christian experience.

Read Ephesians 2:18, 20–22 and 1 Peter 2:6, 7. What do these verses tell us about the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in creating the church?

Through the Spirit, we can come to God the Father. And Jesus is the Rock. He is the foundation of our salvation. All other parts of the church are built on Him.

The work of the Spirit in individual lives leads to building a community of faith known as the church. First, we experience salvation through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Next, the love of God touches our hearts. Then there is a sweet “sharing of life brought about by the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 13:14, NIV) in the church.

Individual believers are like building blocks. God uses them to build a new church “through his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22, NIV). So, as followers of Christ, we should “try [our] best to remain as one. Let peace keep [us] together” (Ephesians 4:3, NIV). In every way possible, we need to try to be one with other believers. Of course, being one with other believers does not mean we are to accept false ideas about the truth.

Read Colossians 3:12–14. In these verses, how should a Christian treat others? How can acting this way help there to be oneness in the church? Why is treating others this way so important to there being oneness in the church?



Jesus is the Rock of our salvation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES US ONE THROUGH BAPTISM (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:13. In this verse, how does baptism make us one with Christ and with the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit makes us one body (church) of believers. We enter into Christ's spiritual kingdom through baptism. The followers of Christ cannot do God's work alone. God created the church for this purpose. To follow Christ means to share the life of other believers in the church. For this reason, baptism is public. It shows we have chosen to follow Christ and share in the life of the church.

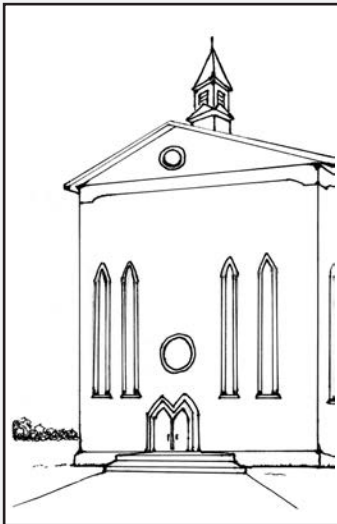
Read Romans 6:3–7. In these verses, what is baptism a symbol of?

Baptism is the act of being buried with Jesus Christ in death in the watery grave. And it is being raised from the water to new life in fellowship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

"Baptism is a very serious act of giving up the world. Baptism is a symbol that we are dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the believer. Baptism is a pledge to live a new life in Christ. This pledge is made before all of heaven and the whole universe. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a person is laid into his or her watery grave. He or she is buried with Christ in baptism. Then he or she is raised from the water to live the new life of faithful obedience to God."—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 1074.

Baptism is a positive step in our walk of faith. All must be baptized who wish to be God's and who wish to live under the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In other words, baptism is a sign of true repentance (turning away from sin). It is a true sign of the death of self to the old life of sin. It is a sign of change to a better way of life in Christ. In other words, baptism is a sign that we have made a covenant (agreement) with God. We, as believers, promise to be faithful to God and His commandments. And God promises that we can depend on His help whenever we need it.

Have you decided to be baptized? If not, what stops you from following Christ in baptism? Have you been baptized? What difference has baptism made in your spiritual walk with Jesus?



We cannot do God's work alone. God created the church for this reason.

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES THE CHURCH ONE THROUGH THE BIBLE (Acts 17:11)

Read Acts 17:11. Also read John 5:39, 46, 47 and John 8:31, 32. What is a sign of a true disciple of Christ? Why is the Bible so important in pointing us to Christ? How does the Bible help us to follow Him faithfully?

The Holy Spirit makes us one with Christ through the Written Word (the Bible) of God. The Bible is a trustworthy source for knowing Jesus and the will (plan) of God. So, reading the Bible and memorizing verses is very important. After all, the Bible is God's Word just for us. It helps us, then, to tell the difference between spiritual truth and error. For example, Paul praised the Bereans (Acts 17:11). Paul said they were noble (good) people because they studied and searched the Bible. And they searched the Bible to find out if what they heard was true.

So, new life in the church and all change for the better must be based on the Bible. This is because the Bible is the foundation on which our faith is built. And our love of Jesus and our love for His Written Word ties us together as one.

Read John 17:17–21. Jesus speaks in these verses about being one in faith. He says that when people are one in faith, it acts as a special sign to show who His followers are. According to John 17:17, what is the cause for this oneness of faith among believers?

The Word of God is truth (John 17:17; Psalm 119:160). And the oneness of faith in the church is the work of the Spirit *with* and *through* the Written Word of God. The Holy Spirit will never lead us to doubt, criticize, leave, or fall short of Bible teaching. Instead, He helps us appreciate the divine authority of the Bible. The Holy Spirit never draws us away from the Written Word or from the Living Word (Jesus). Instead, the Spirit always fills us with the desire to obey both Jesus and the Bible.

The Bible is the source of our beliefs worldwide. Suppose we weakened our belief in the Bible as God's Word of truth to us. What would the result be? The answer is that the oneness of the church would be destroyed.

How much time do you spend reading the Bible? More important, how can you learn to fully obey its teachings?



The Bible is the foundation on which our faith is built.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CAUSES THE CHURCH TO BE ONE IN FAITH AND BELIEF (Ephesians 4:5, 6)

“There is one Lord, one faith and one baptism. There is one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5, 6, NIV). “[He is] above all. [He is] through all. [He is] in you all” (Ephesians 4:5, 6, NKJV). What is Paul telling us here about being one in faith? Where does he say this oneness comes from?



We must be joyful in our faith to the Word of God. Only then will we see oneness in our church.

God calls us to obey His Word. He asks us to do everything we can to be at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18). But in the end, we do not have the power ourselves to be one in our beliefs or in our purpose as a worldwide church. Oneness is not something we do. Instead, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. He works on each individual believer and on the church as a whole.

The foundation of all our beliefs is the Word of God. The Word helps us to be one in our beliefs as a church. And the Spirit and the Word of God agree. They are one in their teaching. So, we need to follow them both together. Suppose we take one without the other. Then we run into danger. Following the Spirit but not the Word can cause us to believe false teachings. Or we can fall into wrong practices. At the same time, to try to follow the Bible without the Spirit's help can take away from the power of the Bible. In the end, there is only one Lord. There is only one faith. And both lead to one baptism.

We must be joyful in our faith to the Word of God. Only then will we be able to see oneness within our church. Oneness in faith and doctrine (church teachings; beliefs) will lead to oneness in the work we do for God.

“We have one Lord. We have one faith. We have one baptism. The gospel of Christ is meant to reach all classes. It is meant to reach all nations. It is meant to reach people of all languages. The gospel is meant to bring all people together in one great brotherhood. We have only one Example [Christ]. We are to be like Him in our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Then we shall be in perfect harmony. All people of different nations will become one in Jesus Christ. They will have the same mind. They will have the same judgment. They will speak the same things. With one mouth, they will glorify God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, page 171.

Look at the Ellen G. White statement above. Do not worry about what others think of you and what others do. Instead ask, What can I do to help the church reach this wonderful goal of being one in the faith?

**THE HOLY SPIRIT JOINS THE CHURCH TOGETHER
AS ONE IN ITS WORK FOR GOD (Acts 2:16–21)**

Read Acts 2:4–11, 16–21. In these verses, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the New Testament believers. What was the result of that outpouring?

The Holy Spirit was responsible for the most powerful outreach in history. This story shows that God can do more through a small group that is joined as one in their love for Him than He can do through a large group of people with divided hearts. But God can do even greater things when we all have given our lives, our strength, our talents, and all that we own and have to Him.

The New Testament church grew as a result of the oneness of believers. They were one in faith, life, and in service to God. At first, the group of believers was small and afraid. But God changed them into a powerful army. In this way, they reached people from many different cultures and languages. And they were one in telling others about “ ‘God’s wonders’ ” (Acts 2:11, NIV).

The same God who worked in New Testament times will be working at the end of time. However, the work needs to be finished before He comes again.

Read Acts 2:42–47. In these verses, in what other ways did the New Testament believers stand together as one?

The early church stood as one for a number of reasons. First, they were one in Bible study. They gave themselves fully to learning and following the apostles’ (teachers and leaders) teaching (Acts 2:42). Second, they were one in church life. Third, they shared meals together, which may mean they were one in worship (Acts 2:42). Fourth, they were one in prayer (Acts 2:42). Fifth, they were one in praising God (Acts 2:47). Sixth, they were one in serving those in need. And seventh, they freely shared what they owned with one another (Acts 2:44, 45). So, we must study the Bible together and come together as a church. Then we will desire to share the good news with others and to help them. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the needs of those around us.

What are some of the services or works done for God in your local church? How do these things help to show the oneness of your church? What more could be done?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Here is what we must do. We are not to wait for something special to happen. Instead, we are to make the most of our opportunities. We must do what must be done so that souls may be saved. We must not waste our time trying to figure out things that God has kept secret from us. Instead, we must yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit. We must do the work we have been given by God to do. We must give the bread of life to souls who are dying of hunger for the truth.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 186.

“Every individual wants the power to influence others. But God’s people must see that putting themselves fully under God’s control is the only way they will be safe from the desire to control others. God’s grace [forgiveness and mercy] changes the heart. It will lead to oneness that has not yet been seen. All who yield [give in] to Christ will be in harmony with one another. The Holy Spirit will create oneness in faith.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, pages 20, 21.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What does Ellen G. White mean when she says, “Every individual wants the power to influence others”? Why is that desire so natural to all of us? And what can we do to fight this desire in our own lives? (Read also Philippians 2:3, 4.)
- ② Some argue that what will really make us one is service, not our beliefs. In fact, they argue that church teachings seem to divide people. So, they think church teachings should not be given an important place in the work we do for God. But why must we have oneness in our teachings and beliefs? Why can there be no oneness in the work we do for God unless we have oneness in what we believe? Why is shared faith a powerful tool for working together as one for God?
- ③ At the same time, how much room is there for differences in belief? Few people are going to understand truth in the exact same way. How can we be one in our faith as a church? At the same time, how can we allow for small differences in what we believe? How do people in your local church deal with differences in understanding but still remain one in faith?
- ④ How can the Bible be a tool to help the church be one in faith? What thoughts or feelings do we need to have in our study of the Word so that we can be one in work and faith?