

Unity (Oneness): The Bond (Unity) of Revival¹



SABBATH—AUGUST 10

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 4:32, 33; John 17:9–11, 20–24; 1 Corinthians 12:12–18; Acts 1:8; Acts 15:1–31; Matthew 18:16–20.

MEMORY VERSE: “I am a prisoner because of the Lord. So I am asking you to live a life worthy of what God chose for you. Don't [do not] be proud at all. Be completely gentle. Be patient. Put up with one another in love. The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together” (Ephesians 4:1–3, NIV).

UNITY² IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF REVIVAL. Disagreements, quarreling, and fighting do not encourage revival. At Pentecost,³ the Holy Spirit was poured out on a church that had united (joined together) in Christ's mission to the world. Its members' different opinions and quarreling were not as important as Christ's larger mission. Fighting for power became unimportant in the face of Christ's command to reach the lost with the gospel. After all, if the early followers of Christ had been busy struggling for power, the work would have failed from the start. Instead, the Holy Spirit led the followers to die to self. So, they were united in purpose and mission.

Where there is no unity, there can be no revival. This is because when Christians become jealous and struggle for power, the Holy Spirit cannot do His work. It is so important that we remove the problems and work through the differences that sometimes separate us. In this way, we can enter into the unity that Christ wants for His church.

1. revival—renewed interest in God and the desire to improve one's spiritual life.

2. unity—people agreeing to work together for God.

3. Pentecost—the time when the disciples (followers) and believers got together in the upper room after Jesus' death to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 11**ANSWERING CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR UNITY (Acts 4:32, 33)**

John 17 records Jesus' great intercessory prayer.⁴ It shows what was on His mind at that important hour of earth's history.

Read John 17:9–11, 20–24. What is Jesus' heartfelt desire here? Why is this so important? How do the disciples' (followers) relationship to one another show true Christian faith? Read Acts 4:32, 33.

The oneness, or unity, of the disciples prepared their hearts for fully receiving the Holy Spirit's power. Christ's prayer for His church was fulfilled (completed). The disciples gave up their different opinions. Love won. Disagreements and quarreling were removed.

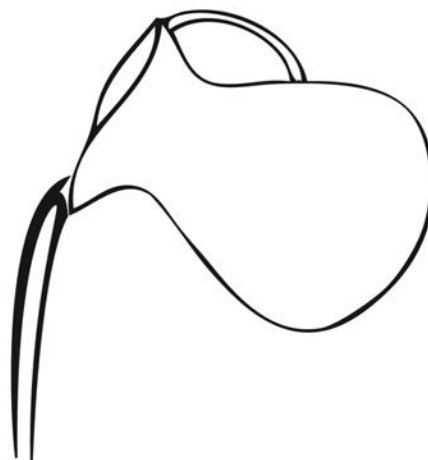
"All the believers were agreed in heart and mind. They didn't [did not] claim that anything they had was their own. They shared everything they owned. With great power the apostles [leaders and teachers] continued their teaching. They gave witness that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead. And they were greatly blessed by God" (Acts 4:32, 33, NIV).

These verses show the disciples as having "one heart and one soul"⁵ (NKJV) with their "great power" in witnessing. In Jerusalem during the first century, Christianity was not popu-

lar. But these dedicated Christians worked hard and shared everything with others. They supported one another. They put aside their personal ambitions. So the disciples' unselfish attitudes and kind spirits prepared them to fully receive the Holy Spirit's power for witnessing.

"After the disciples had come into perfect unity, they were no longer fighting over who would have the highest place. Then the Spirit was poured out. They were all in agreement. All quarreling had been put away."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels [Advice] for the Church*, page 98.

Jesus' prayer in John 17 was fulfilled. Why is this so important for our church? What does Jesus' desire for the unity of the first-century church show about His desire for our church today?



When the disciples had one heart and one soul, the Spirit was poured out.

4. intercessory prayer—prayer for others.

5. "one heart and one soul"—united in mind and spirit and working hard together.

MONDAY—AUGUST 12**NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES OF UNITY (1 Corinthians 12:12–28)**

During the first century, people in the New Testament world were divided into social groups, rich and poor, and men and women. It was a society in great trouble. Freedom, fairness, and human rights were not popular or accepted.

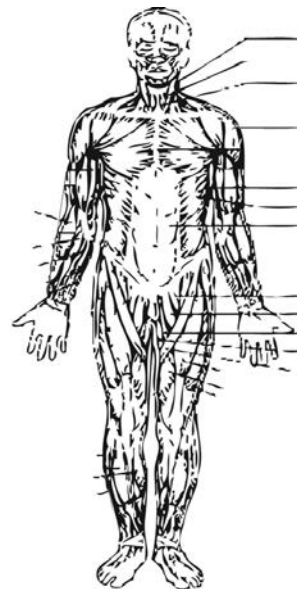
Then Christianity came into the world. It created a social rebellion (war). Jesus' teachings about fairness, helping the poor, and respect for different kinds of people seemed strange. At the same time, New Testament believers got together because of their agreement about the basic ideas of Creation and Redemption.⁶ The believers taught that all humans were created by God. They also taught that all people could be saved through the cross of Christ. The Cross made it clear that each person was worth a lot to God, no matter who or what kind of person he or she was.

How do 1 Corinthians 12:12–18 and 1 Peter 2:4, 5 show how different believers join and work together as one group?

What powerful examples of unity in the church! The apostle Paul uses the example of the body to describe the church and its members. The body is closely knit (connected). Its members (parts) work together and are dependent upon one another. All parts have their special work. If one part of the

body suffers, the entire body suffers (1 Corinthians 12:18–26).

Peter adds the example of a spiritual building with the members as stones. Each stone fits perfectly into the building of a glorious (beautiful) temple that will give glory (praise) and honor to Jesus' name. In these examples, each member is closely connected to every other member. Jesus creates this bond of loving unity in a world of broken relationships, power struggles, and quarreling groups. This proves to be a powerful argument for Christianity. Jesus says this truth clearly: "I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another just as I have loved you. If you love one another, everyone will know you are my disciples" (John 13:34, 35, NIV).



Just as the human body is closely knit (connected), all the members of the body of Christ must work together.

6. Redemption—being saved at a great price. For example, Jesus gave up His life on the cross for our sins.

How well does your local church show the unity described in today's lesson? Ask yourself, too: are you helping to bring unity? If not, what attitudes (feelings) might you be having that could be adding to the problem?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 13

IMPORTANT PARTS OF UNITY: OUR MISSION AND MESSAGE (Acts 1:8)

The New Testament believers showed unity that was more than just emotional warmth among members.

Read Acts 1:8; Acts 4:33; Acts 5:42; Acts 9:31; and Acts 28:28–31. What was the great desire of the New Testament church? How did this desire unite (join together as one) them?

The disciples were excited about something much larger than themselves. Christ's command to take the gospel to the entire world was more important to them than their personal ambitions. The church cannot reach the community with the gospel until it is united. But it will never be united until it is made complete with the preaching of the gospel.

Mission (purpose; calling) brings people together. The early believers were excited about mission. The life, death, resurrection (return to life from the dead), work as High Priest, and return of our Lord kept them work-

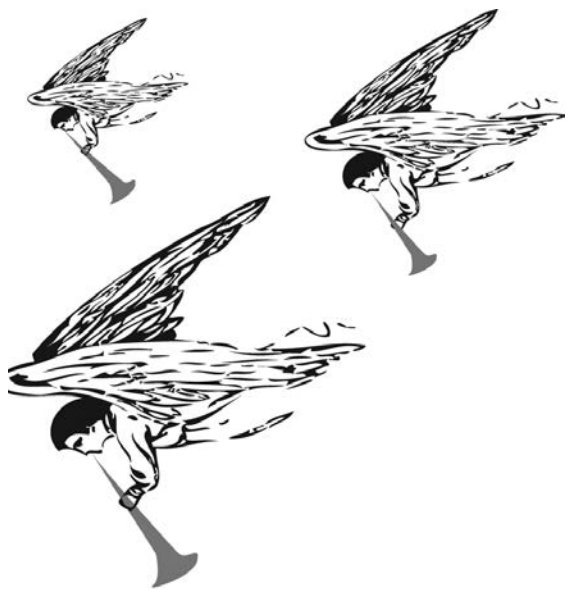
ing together. New "believers studied what the apostles taught" (Acts 2:41, 42, NIV). And the teachings of Jesus helped them to have unity.

The apostle Peter uses the words "present truth" to describe the church's message (2 Peter 1:12). This message of "present truth" in Peter's day united the church and drove it forward with a prophetic⁷ message: They were to announce to the world that the prophecy (special message) about Jesus Christ as Messiah (Chosen One) in the Old Testament was fulfilled. So the church was united with a very important, present-truth message about the fulfillment (completion) of prophecy.

Now, in the final days of earth's history, God has given His people a very important present-truth message, too (Revelation 14:6–12). It is the message of "the everlasting gospel," using the themes (ideas; topics) of judgment, of obedience, and of the Lord's return. This message is what unites Seventh-day Adventists as a worldwide family. If this message were "weak" or treated as old-fashioned, the unity of the church would be broken. And its mission would lose its importance. If the church's message is not clear, its mission will fail. It is the preaching of the prophetic message of the three angels that gives Seventh-day Adventists the reason for our work.

How connected are you with our message and mission? Or, why are you a Seventh-day Adventist? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

⁷ prophetic—foretelling future events.



God has given Seventh-day Adventists the mission of preaching the three angels' messages to the world.

WEDNESDAY—AUGUST 14

THE SYSTEM FOR UNITY (Acts 15:1–31)

The New Testament Bible tells us that the early church had a well-planned system. This system helped to protect the purity of the church's teachings. And it kept the minds of the members on mission.

In Acts 6, a small group of disciples met together to solve the problem of how to share food with the widows of the Greek believers. They chose deacons (church officers) to solve the problem. And church members respected the authority⁸ of

these church leaders.

Likewise, when the apostle Paul accepted Christ and became a believer on the Damascus Road, he was led to Ananias, who was a leader in the church (Acts 9:10–17).

After Paul's baptism by Ananias, the Holy Spirit led him to meet with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. And they agreed to support Paul's ministry (work done for God) (Acts 9:26–30).

Similarly, in Acts 20 Paul met with the church elders from Ephesus to warn them to be on guard against false teachers and their false teachings (Acts 20:17, 27–32).

How did the New Testament church solve a big problem over circumcision?⁹ Read Acts 15:1–31.

The Jerusalem Council saved the first-century church from a serious separation. A well-planned church system with good leaders was very important to keeping the teachings of the church pure. For example, local church representatives¹⁰ were sent to Jerusalem to take part in discussions on doctrine (teachings, beliefs). These discussions would have serious results for the future of the church. When this representative group came to an agreement, it wrote out its decision in a committee action. Then it sent its decision out to the churches where the problem had started: Antioch, Syria, and

8. authority—the rights and power of a leader.

9. circumcision—removal of the foreskin from a male's sex organ.

10. representatives—leaders chosen by members of a church to speak and act for them in church meetings.

Cilicia (Acts 15:23).

Members accepted the decision of the Jerusalem Council. They were joyful that the Holy Spirit had guided them to an answer to their serious problem (Acts 15:30–35).

If you are a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, then you are involved in the church system. What is your part in that system? And how can you be more helpful to the system?

THURSDAY—AUGUST 15

GAINING UNITY (Matthew 18:16–20)

The closer we come to Jesus, the closer we come to one another. We see with new spiritual understanding. This is because the Spirit of Christ helps us to see one another differently. The little things that once bothered us are no longer important to us with Christ's help. Christ's wonderful grace¹¹ helps us to forget bitter quarrels. Old arguments are dropped. The things that separate us from other people are broken down. The gospel heals broken relationships.

For example, the Holy Spirit was fully poured out upon the believers at Pentecost in Acts 2. When this happened the disciples changed their attitudes (feelings) toward one another. In the light shining from the Cross, the disciples understood one another differently.

“Every Christian saw in his brother

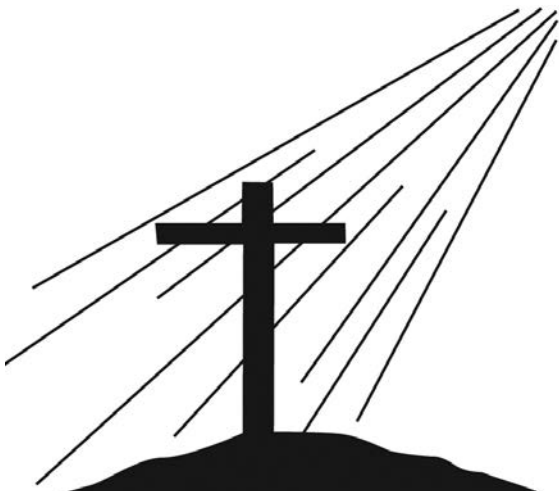
an example of God's love and mercy. One interest became most important. That was to follow Christ all the way. The ambition of the believers was to show Christ's character [who God is] as much as possible and to make His kingdom grow larger.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 48.

List some of the practices that encouraged unity among first-century Christians. Why do these practices so powerfully bring believers together? Read Matthew 18:16–20; Acts 1:14; Acts 12:5, 12; Acts 6:7; Matthew 28:16–20.

Hoping or wishing for unity does not get it. New Testament church members prayed together and talked together. They studied God's Word (the Bible) together. And together they shared their faith. Prayer, Bible study, and witnessing are powerful tools that make and keep the unity of the church strong. As we pray for one another, we grow closer together. Taking part in work that reaches others in the community creates a sense of oneness or togetherness. A living, united and strong church has members who are praying together, studying God's Word, and reaching out to their community.

What are some of the things that may put the unity of your church in danger? Why is it important to understand these things and to be ready for them?

11. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.



In the light shining from the Cross, the disciples saw one another differently.

FRIDAY—AUGUST 16

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “These first disciples were men of different characters [who someone is] and opinions. They were to be the world’s teachers, and they showed characters of different kinds. In order to successfully carry forward God’s work, these different men needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. Christ’s goal was to bring these different men together to work in unity with Himself.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers and Leaders]*, page 20.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Why is a unified (joined as one) church system so important for us? What would happen to our mission, to our message, and to our church if different church groups were to go

their own way? Imagine what a mess that would make!

② In class, answer the question: Why am I a Seventh-day Adventist?

③ Unity is very important for the church. But are there some things that are even more important? If so, what? For example, Paul was dealing with those who preached different doctrines (teachings; beliefs). He wrote: “But suppose even we should preach a different ‘good news.’ Suppose even an angel from heaven should preach it. I’m [I am] talking about a different one than the good news we gave you. Let anyone who does that be judged by God forever. I have already said it. Now I will say it again. Anyone who preaches a ‘good news’ that is different from the one you accepted should be judged by God forever” (Galatians 1:8, 9, NIV). What happened to the Galatians’ unity?

④ Think more about how our message and mission are important to our being Seventh-day Adventists. After all, what would our purpose be without our message? (No one else is preaching this special message to the world.) At the same time, what other things unite us as Seventh-day Adventists beside our message and mission? And why are these important, too?

⑤ Why is unity so important for any revival and reformation (change for the better) among us?