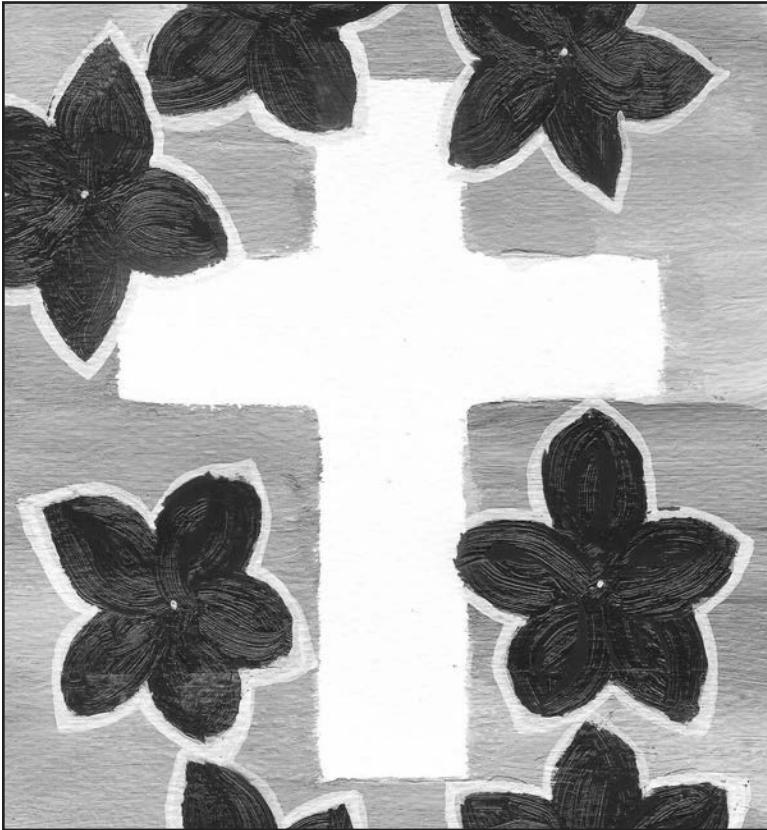


# lesson one

SEPTEMBER 29–OCTOBER 5

## Creation and **Fall**

*“Then [God] brought [Abraham] outside and said, ‘Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:5, 6, NKJV).*



Jesus' ultimate sacrifice gives us the opportunity to live with Him for eternity in the world made new.

Gen. 1:26

## Introduction

# *Unity for a Purpose*

At the very beginning of everything, God introduced stewardship through the Sabbath, thus bringing true unity. The Godhead was united when they made the decision to create humans, as Scripture states, “ ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (Gen. 1:26, NKJV). They were united in Their creation of the world. So the story began for Adam and Eve. God united them both into one family. Even the animals were created in pairs so that they could be united as the same kind.

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### **Church unity is not merely a suggestion; it is an imperative.**

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Now all those things were united for good. But can unity be used also for evil? After the Flood, sinful human beings worked together to build a very tall tower, the Tower of Babel, so that they would not be washed away by a flood again. God saw that this unity was very strong. He said, “ ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’ ” (Gen. 11:6, NIV). So He came down to earth to confuse their language to prevent them from continuing to construct the Tower of Babel. Thus, whether for a good or evil purpose, there is strength in unity.

While unity can be used for nefarious purposes, this lesson focuses on examples of true, biblical, godly unity. After all, from our very origins we see that God created humans with a unified purpose. The unity of Adam and Eve was an illustration of the unity that can be found in Christ. Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25, NKJV). And so “Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23, NKJV). Church unity is not merely a suggestion; it is an imperative that is foundational to the Christian life.

The church was created for a purpose. First Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (NKJV). While studying this week’s lesson, let us remember that God has a divine purpose for the church in Christ.

# Logos *Let's Get Together*

Gen. 1:26, 28;  
Genesis 3;  
Gal. 5:6, 13–16, 22;  
1 John 4:7, 8, 16

## ***Unified in One (John 17:23)***

What do you think of when you hear the word *church*? Perhaps the thought comes up of a building like the one where you go on Sabbath to sing songs, hear a sermon, or see friends. In our society, it is easy to view church as an event or a building, but the early church viewed it as a way of life.

To the early believers, church happened every time they met together, which was pretty much all the time. Every day, they met together for worship or to eat, learn, share, or pray. Their lives were devoted to God and His church, and because of it, great things happened: nonbelievers saw the love they had for one another and wanted to be part of it! While Jesus was on earth, He prayed that His followers would be unified so that the world would know God's love (John 17:23). And through His early church, His prayer was answered.

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## **Love proves the existence of the faith that receives the salvation.**

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### ***Two Connections: God's Love for Us and Our Love for Others***

What is the link between God's love for us and our love for others? Sometimes we can't help but wonder: Why must I love others? Even when others don't like me? Does God really love me? Even when I feel unloved and unlovable? Even when I really mess up?

There are two answers in the book of Galatians. The first answer is the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:13–16, 22), and the other is faith (verse 6).

So walking by the Spirit is the way not to hurt each other but to serve one another through love. In Galatians 5:6, the faith that connects us with Jesus and receives His justification is "faith that works through love" (NCV). In other words, it is the faith that proves that love doesn't merit our salvation. Love proves the existence of the faith that receives the salvation.

Because God loved us, He created us in His own image to rule over all living things, and it was all very good (Gen. 1:26, 28, 31). But since the time sin entered this world, the connection between God and His people has been severed.

### ***How Does This Connection Work? (Gal. 5:22)***

One must walk by the Spirit, because it is the Spirit who produces humility, purity, contentment, faith, and good works; who makes you

different from the world and separates you from sin. It is the Spirit who produces love, enlightenment, and wisdom and makes the truth known to you.

Faith is the first step of a Christian life, and it is the graduate school of the Christian life. The Holy Spirit is the teacher and the power. We never graduate to something else, it is always faith and the Spirit, they walk together. Faith is the channel, the conduit that leads us to the Spirit. Love is the fruit of the Spirit and of faith. God gives us the Holy Spirit. He does this through faith. And love is the fruit of the Spirit received by faith (Gal. 5:22).

The love of Christ is the deep nutritional soil where we are planted; the Holy Spirit is the jar that pours that love into our lives; and faith is the source that we send down into the soil.

### ***How to Become More Unified With God (1 John 4:7, 8, 16)***

God wants us to have a relationship with Him, and in our hearts, we crave a relationship with Him too. He wants us to show to the world what real love is and what the purpose of living is.

First John 4:7, 8, 16 says that God is love—love comes from God. God is the source of love. Like electricity running through electrical wires, love comes from God to us, then flows through us to others in the community. When John says, “Let us love one another,” he is encouraging us to allow God’s love flow through us. Since God is love, love must characterize those who claim to be born of God or to know God (1 John 4:7; 3:10, 14; 4:20, 21). Those who claim to be doing the will of God and reflecting God’s activity in the world will be known by the love they manifest for God and for one another. This was what Jesus told His disciples (John 13:35).

As followers of God, we need to remain focused on Jesus and not the little things that divide us. He wants us unified in love, using our God-given gifts to build each other up and serve a hurting world around us. Most important, 1 John reminds us again that Jesus is the bottom line. Once we meet Jesus and give ourselves over to Him completely, our lives are permanently transformed (take a look at Colossians 3). The past, present, and future and our identity pivot upon Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. If we have that straight, everything else falls into place.

### ***REACT***

1. How can church keep us united?
2. What does it mean to walk in the Spirit?
3. How can we completely surrender ourselves to Jesus?

## Testimony *A Golden Chain of Love*

John 13:34, 35; 17:23–26;  
Eph. 4:15, 16

“Our Heavenly Father is a God of peace. When he created man he placed him in an abode of peace and security. All was unity and happiness in the garden of Eden.”<sup>1</sup> But when humanity fell from His grace, this unity was ruined and people became trapped in sin.

Not all hope was lost. “As the Saviour’s humiliation for us is remembered, . . . the mind is energized to break down every barrier that has caused alienation. Evil thinking and evilspeaking are put away. Sins are confessed, they are forgiven. The subduing grace of Christ comes into the soul, and the love of Christ draws hearts together in a blessed unity.”<sup>2</sup>

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### “Union brings strength; disunion, weakness.”

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“The golden chain of love, binding the hearts of the believers in unity, in bonds of fellowship and love, and in oneness with Christ and the Father, makes the connection perfect.”<sup>3</sup>

“Union brings strength; disunion, weakness. United with one another, working together in harmony for the salvation of men, we shall indeed be ‘laborers together with God.’ Those who refuse to work in harmony greatly dishonor God. The enemy of souls delights to see them working at cross purposes with one another. Such ones need to cultivate brotherly love and tenderness of heart”<sup>4</sup> to achieve again the unity lost.

“When Christ’s prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God’s people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us.”<sup>5</sup>

### **REACT**

How would you as an individual try to restore the unity of the church if the love that bound was smothered by selfishness and pride?

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1. Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 209.
  2. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 650, 651.
  3. Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 173.
  4. Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 43.
  5. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 243.

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Gen. 15:5, 6

## Evidence *Abraham's Seed*

In the book of Romans, Paul supports the doctrine of being “justified by faith” by quoting Scripture. Paul developed his claim by using the example of Abraham. As a prominent ancestor of the Jewish people, Abraham was revered as a model of righteousness and hospitality and as a champion of faith. The theme that Abraham served by faith, not by works, recurs throughout the New Testament. And by being justified by faith, Abraham received the sacred promise from God in Genesis 15:5, 6 that his descendants would be as countless as the stars in the sky.

By connecting to Christ we become Abraham’s spiritual descendants. Therefore, to remain as heirs and to claim our inheritance—God’s kingdom and life eternal—we need to remain a part of God’s family. That is why being united to the “family” is so important.

### **We are the chosen people; we are God’s *segullah*.**

What does the metaphor “Abraham’s seed” mean? A seed is a link between one generation of life and another. It carries the DNA characteristics (both goodness and aberrations) from one generation to next. A seed in the plant kingdom not only links one generation to the next but also preserves life when conditions are harsh. Lastly, a seed’s main purpose is propagation. A single seed can generate and populate an entire forest! The trees in a forest can be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

This sacred promise (Gal. 3:29) made to Abraham brought into existence the bloodline of Jesus Christ Himself and His bride, the church. Abraham’s faith unites generations of believers to finish the plan of salvation. Further, it is our faith in Jesus and in His soon return that unites God’s people, not only with each other but also with the Lord Himself.

We are the chosen people; we are God’s *segullah*. The Hebrew word *segullah*, which means “treasured possession,” was the term used to describe Israel. As God’s *segullah*, our sole commission in the world is to remain united with each other as God’s family on earth. Only then can we claim to be “Abraham’s seed.”

### **REACT**

1. Sociologists tell us that a family is the most important unit of a society. Communities, societies, nations, and even civilizations collapse when the family structure is destroyed. How can unity within God’s family, the church, be preserved?

2. As God’s *segullah*, what are our duties?

## How-to *Unity in Christ*

John 17;  
Phil. 2:3;  
1 Cor. 12:27;  
Eph. 4:2, 3

Jesus had one plan for Christians: unity in Christ. In John 17, Jesus prays before His crucifixion. Verse 11 states: “ ‘I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.’ ” Yes, the “they” mentioned here addresses the disciples. But this prayer is not about the disciples only. Jesus continues His prayer, “ ‘My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message’ ” (John 17:20, NIV). Jesus wants all who will believe in Him—regardless of generation, ethnicity, gender, and age—to be unified in faith.

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### **Jesus wants all who will believe in Him—regardless of generation, ethnicity, gender, and age—to be unified in faith.**

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Two important details bring us closer to unity:

*Set God and His Word at the center of your life.* A big hindrance we encounter as Christians is the temptation that comes from our sinful desires. Blinded by our greed, we tend to chase our desires rather than focus on God and depend on Him. Eventually, we will be dragged far away from God. Our priorities will shift to our physical possessions, and we will lose faith in God. How will this unify our thoughts and minds toward God? To avoid this, we always have to remember to set God and His words as our center and stay within God’s protection and blessing. The Bible says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit” (Phil. 2:3, NIV).

*Prioritize God as your guide.* It is written in the Bible, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27, NIV). In order to properly function as a united body in Christ, all the individual parts must unify by being like-minded with Him. When God created humanity, He made them in His image and in His likeness. Therefore, God is the guide we all have to follow. “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2, 3, NIV). When we follow God as our guide, as believers, we can then properly function in unity as the body of Christ.

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Eph. 4:2

## Opinion

# *All for One and One for All*

The value of this week's lesson is to educate the church on the importance of coming together in love and unity. Paul tells us that we are to consider others' needs before our own. In all modesty, humility, and lowliness of mind, we are to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

### **Jesus' plan for His church is people unified in the faith.**

In most Christian homes, churches, or even countries, authority is a main issue that causes chaos and disunity. Not everyone is always happy with the appointed leaders, which leads to fights and quarrels. Children rebel against the authority of the parents. Local church leaders agitate against the leaders in higher echelons of leadership. Citizens revolt against elected leaders of the nation.

Generally, what happens in the social or political arena influences the religious circle. The church risks being negatively influenced if the members do not open their hearts to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Being a Christian means renewing the mind with the Word of God so as to have the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:17, 18). Hence, the apostle Paul commanded the church members of Philippi: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. . . . Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:2, 5).

When the church members have learned to love one another, they are able to obey the next command: "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you" (Heb. 13:17, NIV).

The Bible underscores the importance of "unity" and "oneness." Unity with others is "good" and "pleasant" (Ps. 133:1). Unity is absolutely essential because the church is the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27), and a body cannot be in disunity or disharmony with itself. If disunity occurs, it essentially ceases to be a body and becomes a disjointed group of individuals. Jesus' plan for His church is people unified in the faith.

Always remember that "united we stand, and divided we fall." No man is an island.

## Exploration

# One in Him

Deut. 7:6, 11

### CONCLUDE

It is easy as human beings to feel alone at times. It may seem that we don't belong. It is at such times that we should remember that we are never alone. Instead, we are part of a family, a family with a mission to carry on the "seed" from Abraham. A family begins in our personal lives and continues through the church. Human beings are strong when united for the same purpose. Imagine how much stronger we would be (spiritually) if we allowed God to work in our lives every day. He extends His invitation of mercy and salvation to all. It is up to us to accept it. Will we allow God to work in our lives so that we can invite others to know Jesus too? More than ever before, as followers of Jesus, we must seek the One because we are a holy people, chosen and special (Deut. 7:6). Let us choose to be one in Jesus Christ.

### CONSIDER

- Listening to "Side by Side" by the Heritage Singers, which invites us to stand as one, going wherever Jesus may lead, especially our final destination, which is heaven.
- Forgiving someone who has wronged you in the past, and, if possible, pray with this person so that you can be one in Him.
- Writing a poem or a song about being united in Christ.
- Organizing a spiritual retreat or Week of Prayer that focuses on unity in Christ.
- Thinking of two to three stories in the Bible that are about unity and writing a short summary that highlights the portions of the stories that focus on unity and how the various characters learned about unity. Show how what the characters learned applies to your life.
- Praying for unity in your home and church, including the worldwide church. Especially pray that God will work in your life to make you an influence that brings Christian unity.

### CONNECT

John 17:23; Ephesians 4.

Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*, p. 169; "Christian Unity," *Review and Herald*, April 27, 1897.

Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief Number 14, "Unity in the Body of Christ," [http://szu.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/28\\_Beliefs.pdf](http://szu.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/28_Beliefs.pdf).

Benjamin F. Reaves, "What Unity Means to Me," *Adventist Review*, December 4, 1986, pp. 18–20.