

## The Key to **Unity**

*“Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:9, 10, NKJV).*



Jesus Christ is the source that allows us to open our hearts, break down barriers, and connect with one another.

## Introduction

# Maybe High School Musical Was Right

Mark 12:31;  
Eph. 4:2-4

In Mark 12:31 Christ says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (NKJV). This completely contradicts what society tells us. We are taught that our love must be earned, but that idea isn’t presented to us in the Bible. In God’s Word we see that we are called to love everyone and treat them with the same patience and love that God shows us. I often find this task of loving to be easy, until someone is dishonest with me or hurts my feelings, and I’m sure many of us can relate. Loving others is easy when things are going well, but the second something goes wrong, we tend to run away from the task God has called us to carry out. We would rather sit alone with our pride, anger, and frustration than be loving and mend our relationships. To my surprise this reminded me of a teen movie I once said I would never talk about, but, here we are!

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**By clinging to Christ and each other  
we are making an effort to keep ourselves united,  
and that is how we will be able to stand against all odds.**

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I was recently reminded of a movie titled *High School Musical*. Now before you stop reading, hear me out. I was very annoyed by this film as a teenager, but looking back at it, I was surprised to find a powerful message. In the film, characters who once disliked each other reconcile their differences by coming to the realization that we’re all in this together. As I reminisced about the memories of my sisters singing the song “We’re All in This Together” all day and night, I thought to myself that maybe Christ wants us to come to the same realization.

Ephesians 4:2 says, “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love” (NLT). God created us all to be part of His eternal family, “one body and one Spirit” (verse 4, NLT), and He knows that we’ll never truly be united unless we practice being humble, gentle, patient, and, most important, loving. We constantly need to make an effort to keep ourselves united in peace. We all feel hurt, angry, ashamed, or betrayed at times. Sitting alone with our pain only allows Satan’s seeds of doubt to grow. By clinging to Christ and each other we are making an effort to keep ourselves united, and that is how we will be able to stand against all odds. As you study this week’s lessons, may you come to the realization that you cannot do this alone, and you weren’t called to. May you strengthen your bond with Christ as well as your fellow believers. May you do this all with a humble, gentle spirit and a patient, loving heart.

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*Stephanie French, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

Eph. 1:9, 10

## Evidence One

Ephesus was a large city in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). It was home to the temple of the fertility goddess Diana, so it was the pagan worship capital of the province. Paul wrote an epistle to the churches in Ephesus while he was under house arrest in Rome. Though Paul was imprisoned, the Romans could not muzzle the spread of the gospel that he preached. He sent this letter to the churches to encourage them in their faith and to emphasize the truth that all believers are united in Christ.

### The equation is simple: us plus Christ equals one—one body, one eternal hope!

In Ephesians, the central message is Christ. “In Him we have redemption” (Eph. 1:7, NKJV) is the central truth that binds us as believers today to those across all the ages. In ancient culture, one could “buy back” a person who was sold into slavery. Christ bought us back from the slavery of sin when He died on the cross. Paul reveals “the mystery of His will” (verse 9) to be the fact that “the Gentiles are fellow heirs . . . and partakers of the promise” (Eph. 3:6, NASB). A study of the Greek shows that “fellow heirs” (*sunkleronomos*) means “joint heirs” or “coheirs,” which means having an equal share in the inheritance.

Though the Old Testament predicted that God’s grace would come to “all families of the earth” in Genesis 12:3, Gentiles having equality with the Jews was a secret that had never before been revealed. We Gentiles are captured under “all families of the earth,” and in Christ we can take part in the inheritance that was purchased with His blood. We are called to be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) because as a drunkard is controlled by wine, so, too, the Spirit-filled person is controlled by the Spirit.

A church of Spirit-filled believers will have wives who choose to submit to their husbands in the same way that they submit to Christ; husbands who will lay down their lives for their wives; children who obey their parents; and employees who honor their employers; all because in everything these believers do, they choose to do for God. What a testimony to the world that would be!

Christ covered us with His blood, and as such we became joint heirs in His inheritance of the eternal kingdom. Are we ready to partake? The equation is simple: us plus Christ equals one—one body, one eternal hope!

#### **REACT**

Examine the idea of being “bought back” from the slavery of sin. How does this idea affect you in your everyday life?

# Logos *The Strength of Unity*

Eph. 1:3–14; 2:11–22;  
4:1–6, 11, 12; 5:15–6:9

Most people attending your local church would tell you that one of the goals of the church is to attain unity; however, is this something we actually practice? My church is no different from yours in the sense that often there is disunity due to some offense or a grudge held without forgiveness. All of these things contribute to a lack of oneness in a church body, oneness that is ultimately Jesus' greatest desire for His church.

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## **Much prayer is needed for the family unit.**

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I'm sure most of you have watched *The Jungle Book*. When "The Law for the Wolves" is read, one line really speaks of unity: "For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack." This quote really speaks to the fact that we are much better together—even though our nature tends to strive for independence.

One of the verses that really captures Jesus' desire for His people is John 17:21, "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in You" (NIV). When we study the life of Jesus, we find that the strength He found to live out His purpose on a daily basis came through His unity with the Father through prayer and connection to Him. Jesus desired us to experience this very same unity, but often our selfishness and pride get in the way of this oneness with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We will explore some passages and see what the Bible has to say about unity in the book of Ephesians.

### ***Blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3–14)***

We have been given many blessings, and one of those is the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), who can bring unity to the body of Christ. God has chosen us to be a part of history and to be partners with Him in uniting people to Christ. This is a huge privilege! One of the benefits of having the Holy Spirit is that we can ask for His help in uniting us with those in our church so that, together, we can be a powerful force in reaching the community. The Holy Spirit is working on our hearts to break down walls of unforgiveness and chains of brokenness, but how often do we choose to ignore that still, small voice and to hold on to our pride? This is exactly what our enemy wants and is working so hard to get us to do. For those who choose to experience that unity and oneness with Christ and with other believers who are working to complete our commission, huge blessings and strength will be poured out.

When I read in Ephesians 1:5–7 that God has adopted us because of what Christ has done, my heart longs to thank Him by doing what He asks of me. It is my hope that we will listen to that voice and experience the blessings of being a united family under Christ.

### ***Breaking Down the Wall (Eph. 2:11–22)***

Jesus' gift on the cross broke down barriers that were common in that day between Jews and Gentiles. Because of what He did, we "are no longer outsiders and strangers. You are citizens together with God's people. You are members of God's family" (Eph. 2:19, NIRV). Even though we no longer have barriers of Jews and Gentiles or the circumcised and uncircumcised, as a church, we still have a lot of walls built up against certain groups or kinds of people. When we show favoritism to or judgment of others, we are not practicing love to members of God's family—we are all a part of the same family. And just as we often have dysfunction in our own earthly family, there is dysfunction within our church family, and it will take intentional effort on our part to show love and to break down these walls.

### ***Unity in One Body (Eph. 4:1–6)***

One—it is the smallest number, but when it comes to unity, it is the biggest number we have. "The Holy Spirit makes you one in every way. So try your best to remain as one. Let peace keep you together" (Eph. 4:3, NIRV). I believe this is why, in the Beatitudes, Jesus blessed the peacemakers—every family needs at least one of those. This passage connects a lot of points in the Bible—we need the fruit of the Spirit to have unity. God has designed unity in all of creation, and yet in the one place where He allows free will, we are given the task of creating unity, along with the Holy Spirit's help. When we have unity, Christ is working more fully within us because "He is in everything" (verse 6, NIRV).

### ***Church Leaders and Unity (Eph. 4:11, 12)***

Even though church leaders have many different roles, the main goal is to be unified and to unify the people of God's church toward one mission. When we experience disunity on a foundational level of leadership, it is very difficult for the church to maintain unity—we, as leaders, are the example through our actions, not through our words and carefully thought-out sermons.

### ***Human Relationships in Christ (Eph. 5:15–6:9)***

According to Ephesians 5:15–6:9, to maintain unity in our relationships, we must encourage others and maintain hearts of gratitude. The Bible mentions gratitude a lot because when we practice it, it is much harder to focus on the negative sides of people, situations, or circumstances. This passage also speaks to different relationship dynamics, and one I want to focus on is the foundational family unit. When we experience unity within our very own households, we are able to take this into our church. Because this unit is so foundational, the enemy is making many attacks on our families. Much prayer is needed for the family unit.

### ***REACT***

1. Examine the family units in your church and how they correlate to the overall unity in the church body.

2. Do you feel you are an example of unity in your relationships with your family and the church? Pray about it.

## Testimony *Unity With Christ*

Eph. 4:1-6

“In these first disciples was presented marked diversity. They were to be the world’s teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had been called, these men, differing in natural characteristics and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ’s object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself. The burden of His labor for them is expressed in His prayer to His Father, ‘That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us;’ ‘that the world may know that Thou has sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me.’ John 17:21, 23. His constant prayer for them was that they might be sanctified through the truth; and He prayed with assurance, knowing that an Almighty decree had been given before the world was made. He knew that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all nations for a witness; He knew that truth armed with the omnipotence of the Holy Spirit, would conquer in the battle with evil, and that the bloodstained banner would one day wave triumphantly over His followers.”<sup>1</sup>

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### “The Bible sets before us a model church.”

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“The Bible sets before us a model church. They are to be in unity with each other, and with God. When believers are united in Christ the living vine, the result is that they are one with Christ, full of sympathy and tenderness and love.”<sup>2</sup>

“The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

A large part of being united with Christ begins with learning how to be united with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the greater the unity we experience with Christ, the more it will spill over into our other relationships. This is part of our journey in sanctification and perfection in Christ and something we can all strive to improve upon daily.

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1. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 20, 21.

2. Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, pp. 267, 268.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.

Eph. 5:15–6:9

## How-to *Submit to Love*

Love is the stuff dreams are made of, a topic consistently explored in art and entertainment. Yet the Bible paints a different picture of what love is. In fact, it lays out a blueprint for how to love those closest to us. In Ephesians 5:2, God calls us to be like Christ and to “walk in love.” First, we are to be mindful and careful about how we live. This means contemplating how we interact with others, how we express our emotions, and how we behave.

### What does it mean to submit?

The Bible tells us to behave wisely, specifically warning us about drinking. It warns us that drunkenness is a gateway to evil, and many a young person has remained stuck in the “club” culture long after the age of innocence. Behaving wisely means contemplating the effects of our actions and their consequences.

Alternatively, behaving wisely also means being very careful about the way we treat others. Ephesians 5:21 tells us to submit to each other out of our reverence for Christ. Chapters 5 and 6 identify how to deal with relationships: wives and husbands, children and parents, and masters and slaves. These verses see much debate in the church, especially verse 22, which tells wives to submit to their husbands. However, we need to place emphasis on verse 21, “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Here God tells us that if we take Him seriously, having respect for who He is, we will submit to each other.

What does it mean to submit? The *Oxford English Dictionary*<sup>1</sup> defines the word as “[to] accept or yield to a superior force or to the authority or will of another person” or “[to] subject [yourself] to a particular process, treatment, or condition.” The verb *submit* implies humbling ourselves and putting one’s fate into another’s hands. It implies having respect for and trust in another person. As such, the word demands much more from us. To submit we must cultivate relationships that allow us to have faith in and respect for others. It would be extremely difficult to trust, have faith in, and ultimately submit to a person we don’t know or respect.

### **REACT**

1. Why do you think submission is an important aspect of love?
2. Why is submitting to one another a challenging command, even for Christians?
3. How do you personally submit to God?

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford University Press, 2017), s.v. “submit,” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/submit>.

## Opinion

# *Unity in Diversity*

Eph. 1:3–14

From the time of the Old Testament, diversity has always been a part of the body of Christ. We know the stories of Ruth, Rahab, and other men and women who not only became Israelites but are also listed in the faith chapter of Hebrews. As modern-day Israel, we as Seventh-day Adventists still enjoy a diverse church, one in which all nations, tongues, and people can be united “under one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:5). Yet this diversity has not always been a unifying point for our church.

### **Diversity is a huge blessing to our church.**

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks about the wisdom and knowledge that Christ gave to us so that through this understanding we can be united (Eph. 1:3–14). The point of unification for the church based on Christ’s structure was not related to cultural background, customs, skin color, education, or any other reason that is related to us as humanity. The only basis for unity was the knowledge of the gospel. This same message is the only one that will take us as a church through to the end of the ages.

It is quite unfortunate that even today, there are still some countries and some conferences within the Seventh-day Adventist Church that are segregated by ethnicity, and others still believe that interracial marriages can cause problems. Yet when we look at the Bible, Boaz and Ruth were from two different cultures and two different social backgrounds. They came together under one “heavenly” culture and became a part of the lineage of Jesus Christ Himself. The same can be said of Rahab, the harlot, who married an Israelite.

As the body of Christ, we are admonished by Paul to look to the importance of the unifying factor of Christ’s message, which is His power to “bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10, NIV). Asia Minor had people of all ethnicities. Even on the Day of Pentecost, many different individuals were there to receive the message of the gospel. Diversity is a huge blessing to our church. It brings flavor to our worship, and it tells the world that we can have *one* mind even though we are different.

### **REACT**

1. How does cultural diversity play a role in witnessing and sharing the gospel?
2. What are the positive benefits of being able to be united, yet different?
3. How has your interaction with various cultures improved your personal life?

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*Elaine Thompson, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada*

Rom. 12:3–8

## Exploration *Family Reunion*

### **CONCLUDE**

Paul beautifully compares the body of Christ to a human body, in which each part has a specific role and a vital function for the body as a whole. In order for the whole body to work properly, all the members need to work in harmony, each executing its functions. The same is true for the body of Christ, the church. The church is composed of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds, with all kinds of abilities and gifts. Most of the time these “differences” in abilities and gifts can easily divide people, but despite these differences it is important for all of us to keep in mind that there is one essential point in common—our faith in Christ. On this essential truth, the church finds unity. When we put ourselves away and find our identities in Christ and when the Holy Spirit of God resides within us, we will become united and live as if we were all part of a big spiritual family. Heaven will feel like a massive family reunion.

### **CONSIDER**

- Photographing a group of people gathering in any activity and then analyzing how these people interact with each other and what the common denominator is that brings them together.
- Researching the root meaning of the word *unity* and presenting your findings to your Sabbath School class.
- Organizing an activity in which the main purpose or goal will be accomplished only if the whole group cooperates.
- Meditating on the most Spirit-filled event that Peter witnessed and took part in—Pentecost—and how we can witness and experience the same event in our church today.
- Observing in nature how ants work together to prepare for winter. Reflect on the idea that they might have a family reunion every year in the wintertime, celebrating their unity in hard work.

### **CONNECT**

1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 1:10, 11  
Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, “Co-Ordination of Home and Church,” p. 548.