

*Images of*  
**Unity**

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*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12, NKJV).*



God's light not only gives us hope and strength but helps us to support one another when we experience pain and suffering. When we join together as the body of Christ, what kind of image are we portraying to the world?

## Introduction

### Tile 92

Eph. 2:19, 20

The playhouse came together as the final tiles for the roof were placed. When the last piece was glued, everyone gave a sigh of relief.

Door called a group meeting. Just as he started his welcome, the school doors opened with a bang and first-graders rushed toward the newly built playhouse. They climbed the roof, smudged the windows, and pounded on the door. The children made sure to explore everything. Door and Window were almost overwhelmed with the attention the playhouse was getting, but they felt loved. They did not want the children to leave. Not everyone, however, enjoyed the experience.

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### He let go.

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Tile 92 disliked the kids. He disliked recess. He disliked his job. He didn't see it as love but, rather, as annoyance. He wished he could leave, and soon his opportunity came.

A fierce storm blew across the playground. Every part of the playhouse held on to each other tightly so that they wouldn't be blown apart. Everyone, that is, except Tile 92. He didn't want to be held. He wanted to leave the playhouse and do his own thing. His friends shouted encouragement and tried to convince him to hold on, but he didn't listen. He let go. And soon a gust of wind tore him from the group and landed him far away in a puddle.

The next day, the playground was a mess, leaves and branches everywhere. The playhouse remained intact—except for the visible hole left by Tile 92. The parts were sad to see him gone, because no one could fill that hole the way he had.

During recess the kids ran to the playhouse and played inside its cozy walls. As Tile 92 watched, he felt sorry for them. Though he was in a puddle, he was much happier watching from a distance—until the day came when, without the protection of the others, he drifted on a wave of rainwater into the storm drain. It wasn't long before he understood that when you work with friends, family, and community, you can do a work far greater than when you work by yourself.

Ephesians 2:19 and 20 says, "You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself" (NLT).

Christ is our cornerstone, and together we are His house. As a church family, we each have an important part to play: to hold tightly to each other while also reaching out to those who feel like drifting away. As we continue to unify our church, let us remember our role is to keep building upon our foundation, growing in number as God's family and losing no one in the process.

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1 Cor. 12:12

## Evidence *The Key to Survival*

It seems that certain individuals from Corinth considered some gifts to be better or more important than others, and they were condescending to those who had spiritual gifts that they believed were of lesser value. Learning this, Paul countered the error by comparing the followers of Jesus to a human body, which is made up of many different parts. While some parts may seem more insignificant than others, the reality is that each part is important, and their working together in harmony is crucial to the optimal functioning of the body.<sup>1</sup>

### **Each person's actions—or inaction—affect the body as a whole.**

Using the human body as a metaphor of unity was not entirely new to Paul's audience. In fact, a well-known fable in the Greco-Roman world told of a body whose members thought that the stomach was getting all the benefits without doing any work. In response to the stomach's perceived idleness, the other members of the body rebelled, only to find that the revolt was causing the body to weaken and perish.<sup>2</sup> While this fable was often told with political connotations, Paul used elements of this familiar tale to make a spiritual point. If the individual followers of Jesus—who collectively constitute the body of Christ—are not able to operate in unity and value one another's roles in the church, their future is grim. Additionally, while the body of Christ is composed of individual members, the body is ultimately one, and each person's actions—or inaction—affect the body as a whole.

In today's society, people seem to be interested in highlighting their differences and to be looking for reasons why they cannot work in harmony with certain individuals. Unfortunately, some of these attitudes are slipping into our church and causing serious rifts among church members. Let the words of the apostle Paul remind us this week that the survival of our church depends on our ability to work together and that each individual has a vital role to play within the body of Christ.

### **REACT**

Do you think it is important for us to work together and get along with those in the church, even those with whom we greatly disagree? Why or why not?

1. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld et al., *The New Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible: A-C*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), p. 646.

2. E. Schweizer, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 323, 324.

**Logos**  
*We Fit Together  
Beautifully*

Exod. 19:5, 6;  
John 10:1–11;  
1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 12:12–26;  
Eph. 2:19–22;  
1 Tim. 3:14–16;  
1 Pet. 2:9

***The People of God (Exod. 19:5, 6; 1 Pet. 2:9)***

As human beings we crave belonging to a group because it gives us identity. I belong to a group that fallen humanity has designated a racial group (I prefer to think of it as the human racial group), and you do too. You and I belong to an age group, a gender group, an income group, an interest group. Human beings have mastered the art of separating into groups by their differences. And human groups have one big flaw. Every group is full of sinful human beings. Sometimes they work together, but often they don't.

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**That “brain” is Jesus.**

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When God said to the people of Israel several thousand years ago, “You are My chosen people,” He identified a specific group. “You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. . . . You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:5, 6, ESV). God meant, “You have the identity and characteristics of My people. You belong.” God chose this one group, the descendants of Abraham, for a particular purpose: to tell all the other people about Himself and invite them into the group.

About 1,500 years later, the apostle Peter said, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his [God’s] own possession” (1 Peter 2:9, ESV). The descendants of Abraham are still that special group. According to Peter, who knew Jesus in person, the group’s purpose is still “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (verse 9, ESV). This is not an elitist, segregated group. God’s chosen people group is still intended to tell other people about Him and invite them into the group.

***The Household of God (Eph. 2:19–22)***

As people come into God’s special group, they don’t merely join the ranks of “a holy nation.” The apostle Paul said, “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19, ESV). They become part of the family and are treated as sisters or brothers. The household is founded on “the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (verses 20, 21, ESV).

The household of God has expectations of family members. They are no longer outsiders but expected to behave like insiders. What are those expectations?

***The Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 1 Tim. 3:14–16)***

Paul answers, “I am writing . . . to you so that . . . you may know how one

ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:14, 15, ESV). Now read 1 Corinthians 3:16, and take note that “you” is plural. When Paul says, “you are God’s temple,” he means the whole group together is the “place” where God lives. Then what does Paul mean when he says in verse 17, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him” (ESV)? He means that if any one person or subgroup in the household of God causes harm to the group, he or she will be punished. “God’s temple [group of people] is holy” (verse 17, ESV).

The expectation laid on all of us is that we will not behave as a destructive force in any way. That requires us to work together in love. We don’t even need to do something in order to be destructive to this holy group. Doing nothing is harmful. When we come into the group, we have joined the group’s holy purpose and will act for the good of all.

### ***The Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–26)***

The twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians may be the best understood and least applied chapter in the New Testament. It says that through Jesus we belong to a body with various working parts. Each person is a distinct working part. “If all were a single member [i.e., the same working part], where would the body be?” (verse 19, ESV). The Holy Spirit gives abilities and a role to each part (person), and each of us has the mandate to build up the household.

You may find it upsetting to discover that individuals or subgroups in the church, or even in your church, sometimes treat others in the body with disrespect or dishonesty. They have forgotten, temporarily, that their role is to support and encourage all the other “parts” of the body. However, we cannot allow ourselves to respond in the same way. We are still obligated to act as supportive “parts” regardless of the misbehavior of others.

### ***Sheep and Shepherd (John 10:1–11)***

The household of God, as a working body, has a “brain” that coordinates its actions. That “brain” is Jesus.

We are mixing metaphors here, but the disciple John reports Jesus’ own metaphor of the shepherd and sheep to illustrate how the body works. The sheep are the “body,” and Jesus leads them. They know His voice calling out to them because they know what He is about and are defined by being in His group. They do not answer the call of others who try to lead them astray.

Jesus said, “I came that they [all the sheep] may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, ESV). The purpose of the “body” of Jesus remains the same today: share God’s love and invite people into the group. Everyone who accepts the invitation belongs. Each one takes the role of a happy working part.

### **REACT**

1. Is it too idealistic to think that the church (the household of God) will work as harmonious body parts and accomplish God’s purpose?
2. What kind of “body part” are you?

## Testimony *Quarried by Truth for the Temple of God*

Eph. 2:19–22

“The Jewish temple was built of hewn stones quarried out of the mountains; and every stone was fitted for its place in the temple, hewn, polished, and tested before it was brought to Jerusalem. And when all were brought to the ground, the building went together without the sound of ax or hammer. This building represents God’s spiritual temple, which is composed of material gathered out of every nation, and tongue, and people, of all grades, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. These are not dead substances to be fitted by hammer and chisel. They are living stones, quarried out from the world by the truth; and the great Master Builder, the Lord of the temple, is now hewing and polishing them, and fitting them for their respective places in the spiritual temple. When completed, this temple will be perfect in all its parts, the admiration of angels and of men; for its Builder and Maker is God.”<sup>1</sup>

**“We who are living in this age have a work to do,  
a part to act.”**

“This world is God’s workshop and every stone that can be used in the heavenly temple, must be hewed and polished, until it is a tried and precious stone, fitted for its place in the Lord’s building. But if we refuse to be trained and disciplined, we shall be as stones that will not be hewed and polished, and that are cast aside at last as useless.”<sup>2</sup>

“Paul and the other apostles, and all the righteous who have lived since then, have acted their part in the building of the temple. But the structure is not yet complete. We who are living in this age have a work to do, a part to act. We are to bring to the foundation material that will stand the test of fire—gold, silver, and precious stones, ‘polished after a similitude of a palace’ (Psalm 144:12). To those who thus build for God, Paul speaks words of encouragement. . . . ‘If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.’ The Christian who faithfully presents the word of life, leading men and women into the way of holiness and peace, is bringing to the foundation material that will endure, and in the kingdom of God he will be honored as a wise builder.”<sup>3</sup>

### **REACT**

Why is it significant to understand the transition from the physical temple to God’s spiritual temple? Why was there no need of a physical temple after Jesus’ resurrection?

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p.180.

2. Ellen G. White, “Words for the Young,” *The Youth’s Instructor*, August 31, 1893.

3. Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 224.

Mark 3:25;  
Luke 10:27–37;  
John 14:21;  
1 Cor. 12:12–26;  
Eph. 2:19–22

## How-to *Playing Nice With Others*

Have you ever run into someone you don't like? Maybe he teased you or took the last spot on the soccer team, or maybe her mother was a convict, or he voted for the wrong person. Some people just irk you! When it comes to church unity, it's how we act when we're with the people we don't like that matters.

### **It's how we act when we're with the people we don't like that matters.**

Luke 10:27–37 gives us the story of the good Samaritan, but first it tells us the two commands we are to follow: love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said that everyone we meet is our neighbor. And John 14:21 reminds us that if we love Him, we will do as He says.

Before we can truly be Christian and enter into unity, we have to forgo other allegiances, including sports teams; school affiliations; political parties; denominations; and racial, cultural, and gender identity in favor of God. After shedding the weight of our other allegiances, we can see those around us as God sees them: our siblings in Christ.

After establishing Christianity as our impetus, a reason to "play nice" springs to view. As Ephesians 2:19–22 says, any person you meet may be a fellow sojourner and a part of the same temple. It would be terrible to sabotage our own team. We may have our differences, but God can use our distinct attributes and qualifications to accomplish miraculous things.

First Corinthians 12 reminds us that we are the body of Christ, with many different parts. We may be tempted to prioritize our own strengths and proclivities above those of another, but as we listen to and experience testimonies from others, it becomes clear that some character "flaws" prove to be remarkably effective in service of the gospel.

The next time someone gets under your skin, remember that God asked you to love them not only as a way of showing that you love Him but also because you might otherwise be working against His team. It's like Jesus said, long before Abraham Lincoln was born: "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25, NIV). If we focus on what unites us (Christ) rather than what divides (Satan's distractions), we demonstrate our love for our Father in heaven.

### **REACT**

Do you know someone whom everyone tries to avoid? What are some ways you can be neighborly to that person?

## Opinion

*A Young Adult's Take on  
Unity in the Church*

Acts 2

What does unity in the church mean to me as a young adult today, right now? When I think about unity in Scripture, some stories and passages come to mind—John 17, Acts 2 and 3, Numbers 13 and 14, and others. But what do these passages tell us about unity and the effects thereof?

**We come together as a unit, with different skills and ideas,  
for a purpose.**

I am a gamer. I love playing video games, board games—any type of games. Some of my fondest memories of gaming are not playing by myself but playing with others either in person or online. We come together as a unit, with different skills and ideas, for a purpose. This is the definition of unity. Online gaming has unity that is unhindered by race, class, place, or time. For me to witness a team working together in harmony is the best feeling in the world. Friends are made and experiences shared.

This same experience is to happen for the church in every age. But what does this unity consist of? How does it come together? And what are the end results?

The Lord Jesus Christ prayed a prayer of unity in John 17. This is the recipe for the early rain in Acts 2. The Spirit of Truth would empower it. It was based on truth for the benefit of others, and it was to be a witness to the world about the Christ and who He is. We see the result of this prayer at Pentecost in Acts 2, when three thousand souls came to know Christ and the early church began.

However, the opposite of this prayer is like the turning back of Israel at the border of Canaan. The people didn't believe the faith-filled report of Joshua and Caleb but instead allied themselves with the faithless spies and forfeited the promises of God.

What principles can we millennials use today? We are a family in Christ, and the family is the basic unit. Within this family we are not bonded by blood; we are bonded by the Word of God. When we follow the recipe in John 17 and Acts 2, we “bring our hearts into unity with Christ, and our lives into harmony with His work,” so that “the Spirit that fell on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost will fall on us.”<sup>1</sup>

Who doesn't want this? I know I do. This power is the prequel to Christ's return, and the greatest witness to the world concerning Christ will be seen again. Let us take heed to Christ and His servant and hasten the coming of the Lord.

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 246.

1 Cor. 12:12

## Exploration

# Everyone Belongs

### CONCLUDE

In Scripture, we're given various metaphors that help us to understand how God's church is supposed to work. For example, the metaphor of a body, with its various parts and systems all working together to accomplish each of our daily activities, is a powerful illustration of the unity and diversity that is needed among God's people. The following are some practical ideas that may help us to imaginatively explore these metaphors.

### CONSIDER

- Thinking about how houses are like human bodies, in that they comprise many interconnected systems (plumbing, electrical, heating, and so on). Imagine what would happen if any one of these systems breaks down. How does it affect the other systems? How might this relate to the operation of the church?
- Starting a particular song with only one voice or instrument. Gradually add another instrument or voice at regular intervals, until all are included. Compare the sound of a lone participant and the entire group. (If you are involved in music at your church, try this exercise with the group.)
- Brainstorming additional metaphors or imagery that were not included in this week's study that may further illustrate the concept of unity among diverse parts to achieve a common goal. Discuss each proposed image in your small group.
- Memorizing John 17:22 and 23, the prayer that Jesus prayed for His disciples before His death. Add it to your own prayers. Perhaps repeat it to yourself quietly as you enter the church building on Sabbath morning. Observe whether this makes a difference in your own behavior at church.
- Observing a small "patch" of nature—perhaps your own backyard or a little area of your local park. Try to count as many different types of animals and plant life as you can. Think about how all of these organisms are interconnected, and how they depend for their existence upon one another.
- Reflecting on just how many parts of your body are involved in a routine task (brushing your teeth, for example), while engaged in that simple task. Imagine what would occur if any one of those parts malfunctioned.

### CONNECT

1 Corinthians 12; 1:10; Ephesians 4:1–13; Colossians 3:12–17; John 17:22, 23; Psalm 133; 1 Peter 3:8, 9; Romans 12:3–8; Matthew 23:8; Galatians 3:27, 28.

Ellen G. White, "Christian Unity," *Review and Herald*, April 27, 1897.

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