



## Introduction *With One Mind*

This meme keeps popping up all over my social media, time and again: “2000 years ago, Jesus Christ ended all debate on which lives matter, He died for all.” Even in death, Christ exemplifies unity.

I came across the following excerpt in a book: “A newborn wildebeest calf was having difficulty getting to its feet. Sensing a favorable opportunity, a hyena approached. Immediately a number of adults formed a broad front, protecting the calf still thrashing on the ground. Wildebeest beside wildebeest presented a formidable row of sharp horns, and the hyena skulked away. Almost immediately afterward a lioness attempted to approach the newborn. Normally the big cat’s appearance would have resulted in the herd galloping off in wild flight. Instead they closed ranks, once again forming a menacing vanguard. This courageous defiance impressed the lioness, and she didn’t attack the horned front line but slunk off to safer ground. By that time the calf had gained its feet and was able to run with the herd.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Even in death, Christ exemplifies unity.**

Imagine this scenario in our church: a new convert, a troubled member, a struggling addict. How can the church stand firm and together to help this individual against the hyenas and the lions of this world?

In Acts 15, Luke beautifully describes discord and unity experienced in the early church. The chapter deals with the conflict of circumcision and preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Here are a few points that stand out to me:

1. They came together to consider the matter at hand. Discussion is the first step in resolving conflicts. There might be a lot of disputing, anger, and hurt; nonetheless, in the end, a resolution occurs.

2. They overcame the dispute under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Peter proclaims in Acts 15:7–11 that God gave both the Jews and the Gentiles a choice and made no difference in bestowing the Holy Spirit to them.

3. They proclaimed God’s signs, wonders, and miracles in the past. They revisited the scriptures and promises, which resulted in spreading the gospel far and wide with renewed strength. Time and time again, it has been proven that the Scriptures always strengthen us, whatever the circumstances. The strength of unity has been manifested from Creation all the way to Christ’s death on Calvary through the persistence of the disciples and spreading of the gospel.

In this week’s lesson, we are going to explore how the church today stands as a visible witness to the saving work and power of Christ. Let us contemplate being in one accord and of one mind as we continue with our study.

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1. Philip Seff and Nancy R. Seff, *Petrified Lightning: And More Amazing Stories From “Our Fascinating Earth”* (Contemporary Books, 1996).

*God's Call to Unity*

Luke 22:24;  
 John 17:20–23;  
 Acts 2:46;  
 Rom. 14:1–6;  
 Phil. 2:1–3;  
 Eph. 1:7–10;  
 2 Cor. 5:17–21

***Unity in God's Example (John 17:20–23)***

Did you know that Jesus prayed for our church? His most passionate prayer for us was that we would achieve unity: “That they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:22, 23, NKJV).

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all in perfect harmony, though they are very different in their roles and personalities. Christians are called to reflect God's character to the world, and that means following His example of unity. We are, in a way, a mirror that shines God's light upon a dark world.

Just as the perfect, Triune Godhead has complete unity and respect for the uniqueness of each Person, so we must also find harmony and respect among one another.

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## He knew that this would be our greatest challenge.

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***Unity in Jesus' Sacrifice (Acts 2:46; Eph. 1:7–10; 2 Cor. 5:17–21)***

Jesus had to die to reconcile us to God. As sinners, we were separated and cut off from perfect fellowship with our Father. In God's ultimate rescue mission to the world, Jesus' death brings us back into fellowship.

Just like Jesus had one mission: to bring us back to God, our mission is the same: to bring others into the same relationship. The New Testament church in the book of Acts continued together with “one accord” (Acts 2:46)—or one gospel mission. The calling is the same for our church today.

Ultimately, God wants to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Eph. 1:10, NKJV). Just as God reconciled us to Himself, we also need to reconcile ourselves to one another in love.

***Unity in Diversity (Rom. 14:1–6; Phil. 2:1–3)***

Unity doesn't mean we have to agree on everything. Of course, blatant doctrinal fallacies must be addressed in love, but we shouldn't be contentious over trivial matters. In other words, we shouldn't make mountains out of molehills. The Bible tells us, “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Rom. 14:1, NKJV).

Before you correct someone, examine your motives and the weight of the matter. Are you engaging in a debate to exalt yourself or to be right at the expense of a brother or sister? Will the exchange strengthen or

weaken their relationship with God?

We must examine our motivations before engaging in disputes because there is always a cost. Sometimes it's worth it, as when we lovingly help lift up a brother or sister struggling in sin. Other times, it does nothing but bring contention with no positive outcome.

Paul said, "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:2, 3, NKJV). This doesn't mean we think the same way; it means that we have the same love and the same purpose—to exalt Jesus and bring others into unity with Him.

### ***Unity Is Our Witness (John 17:20–23; Luke 22:24)***

When Jesus prayed for future believers and desired their unity, He also had the Great Commission in mind. If you look around the world today, you see fighting and broken relationships. Satan is doing everything he can to bring about dissension. Divorce rates are high, and conflict exists between children and parents, as the family unit is broken. On a broader scale, wars and rumors of wars abound, furthering Satan's goal of complete division.

Sadly, this is also creeping into the church, where congregations break apart due to infighting. It even happened among Jesus' own disciples when they fought over who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). If Satan can keep us fighting among ourselves, we lose our focus on God's heart for the world. After all, how can we bring new believers into a church whose members are at war with each other?

Jesus prayed, " 'And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me' " (John 17:22, 23, NKJV).

Why do you suppose Jesus prayed for our unity? He knew that this would be our greatest challenge. We achieve this high calling only through dependence upon Jesus, our understanding of true humility, and our replacement of self with Savior. When we do this, the world will take notice of our witness and will know that Jesus is the only way to God's love.

Beloved believers, if we are to reach everyone with the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must learn to love one another in complete unity, with the single, like-minded purpose of bringing others into the family of God.

### ***REACT***

1. What are some of the issues that are causing division among believers today? When conflict does arise, how can we keep the spirit of Christ in our interactions?

2. If Jesus was willing to die to bring unity between God and humanity, shouldn't we place it at the highest priority in the church? Are we doing that?

3. How can we walk in better unity with one another in order to reach a lost world with the gospel of Christ?

## Testimony

# *Strength in Unity*

Acts 4:32

They say a chain is as strong as its weakest link, and apparently Satan knows this all too well. “Satan works to make the prayer of Christ of none effect. He makes a continual effort to create bitterness and discord; for he knows that where there is unity, there is strength,—a oneness which all the powers of hell cannot break.”<sup>1</sup>

### **“The Lord desires His workers to counsel together, not to move independently.”**

“The Lord has called us to unity in the bonds of Christian fellowship and love. ‘A new commandment I give unto you,’ said Christ, ‘That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.’ ‘If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.’”<sup>2</sup>

“The Lord desires His workers to counsel together, not to move independently. Those who are set as ministers and guides to the people should pray much when they meet together. This will give wonderful help and courage, binding heart to heart and soul to soul, leading every man to unity and peace and strength in his endeavors.”<sup>3</sup>

“While it is true that the Lord guides individuals, it is also true that He is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing this thing, another that.”<sup>4</sup> United we stand; divided we fall.

### **REACT**

1. What are some of the issues on which the church is divided? How can we improve or create a sense of unity in the church?

2. In 1 Corinthians 12 the body of Christ is compared to the human body. How does this illustration exemplify how the church should function in unity?

1. Ellen G. White, “Christian Unity,” *Review and Herald*, April 27, 1897.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church Regarding Individual Responsibility and Christian Unity*, p. 15.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Col. 3:1–17

## Evidence *Rats in the Cellar*

The church should be united in worship, ministry, and purpose, but unity starts with individuals. We must first be made alive in Christ (Col. 3:1–4). More than just trying to live like “good Christians,” we need an authentic change of heart. C. S. Lewis shares this illustration: “When I come to my evening prayers and try to reckon up the sins of the day, I have sulked or snapped or sneered or snubbed or stormed. And the excuse that immediately springs to my mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected. [But] surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is? . . . If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. . . . After the first few steps in the Christian life we realise that everything which really needs to be done in our souls can be done only by God.”<sup>1</sup> Daily surrender to Christ is the prerequisite to a corporate unity that expresses God’s salvation to the world. The rats in the cellars of our souls have to go.

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**“Everything which really needs to be done in our souls  
can be done only by God.”**

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Outward change follows inward change, so it is no wonder that Paul wrote, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (verse 15, NIV). The Jewish understanding of “the heart” was similar to what we understand “the mind” to be: the part of you that controls your will and choices. As Christ changes our hearts, we begin aligning more closely with the character of God.

### **REACT**

1. How do the specific sins listed in Colossians 3:5–9 contrast with the principles of Christian relationships in verses 12 and 13?
2. Is it possible to have corporate unity without individual change? Is eradicating un-Christian behaviors enough?
3. How does knowing that “the heart” relates to an individual or entity’s will (and not just emotions) change your understanding of verse 15?

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1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: A Revised and Enlarged Edition, With a New Introduction, of the Three Books, the Case for Christianity, Christian Behavior, and Beyond Personality* (New York: Walker & Co., 1999), bk. 4, *Beyond Personality: Or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity*, chap. 7, “Let’s Pretend.”

## How-to *Gospel Community*

Heb. 10:24, 25

Hebrews teaches us what it means to live in authentic gospel community and why it's so important to surround ourselves with people who encourage us and lift us up. The idea of unity and accountability is hard to grasp in our individualistic society. By default, we tend to focus more on ourselves and our own personal story, and because of this, we miss out on the richness of deep-rooted relationships. The Christian life should be active, not passive.

### God is in community with Himself.

The book of Ecclesiastes says, "Woe to anyone who is alone when he falls and no one is there to help him get up" (Eccles. 4:10, ISV). Jesus was our greatest paradigm of gospel community, and we see this in His relationship with the apostles—the men who walked daily with Jesus, shared meals together, prayed together, celebrated together, and relied on one another. Jesus challenged His brothers to live according to God's truth.

Another powerful illustration of unity is the Trinity. Think about it: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are individual, yet they are fully *one*. God is in community with Himself. How amazing is that?

We see a theme throughout the New Testament: to love one another. It also makes another strong point: we aren't to try to live the Christian life on our own. We are instructed to meet together on a regular basis to pray together, encourage one another, and live life together. Not meeting together quickly becomes a habit—a bad habit—and habits are hard to change.

We need the encouragement of other believers if we are to keep going forward and to avoid being pulled off track. Encouraging one another is connected to the importance of living in community with other believers. We can't encourage one another unless we are regularly together. When we are invested in mutual encouragement and standing with one another, we are also learning to function well as Christ's body, whatever may happen—even as "the day" draws near, the return of Christ.

Being vulnerable and transparent with other believers can be messy and uncomfortable, but what a gift it is to have someone celebrate when you celebrate and cry when you cry. Community is our lifeline, and we simply cannot miss out on this because of fear or discomfort. Let's encourage one another on toward the love of Christ.

### **REACT**

What steps could you take today to start living in community with the people God has placed in your life?

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Heb. 10:19–25

## Opinion

# *The Social Hack to Move From Togetherness to Unity*

Uzoma (Oo-zoe-ma) said with a sense of desperation, “Oh, my stomach, I’m starving! I can’t wait to eat Thanksgiving dinner. Lord help me! This year’s annual Turkey Trot Race was a blast, but food, family, and friends will be even better.” Uzoma, like many other young adults, is an active college student who went home for the American Thanksgiving break to be with friends and family for the holidays.

### **Though we need togetherness to create unity, unity does not come as a result of togetherness.**

Though many people rave about the delicious food they will be consuming and their yearly fight against seasonal overeating, most when surveyed would say that their main attraction to the holidays is the togetherness they experience. Though Uzoma had the choice to use his phone camera with his family and stay at college preparing for finals, he chose to go home for the sake of togetherness.

Though the Bible is peppered with lessons of togetherness and unity, it’s a lesson many Christians are slow to learn and quick to forget. The beauty and power of unity and togetherness is that it is accomplished theologically by the gospel and practically by allowing the gospel to use us in stepping out of our comfort zones.

So how does the Christian experience togetherness and unity in a world that is seemingly already connected through social media?

Togetherness is often experienced during church, school, and events we have to attend. Though we need togetherness to create unity, unity does not come as a result of togetherness. For the Christians who seek to be part of the body of Christ and desire unity, here are two suggestions:

*Comfortably uncomfortable.* If the gospel is truly for everyone, God will use you to bring worldly people into the church. However, what does this mean? Though we are to be uncomfortable with ways of the world, we should be comfortable around worldly people (cf. 1 John 2:15–17).

*Social mixer.* After interacting with people who don’t look or talk like you, introduce them to your Christian friends. The key to a Christian togetherness that leads to unity is to first gain trust by being loyal to the friendship and then, second, to deepen the togetherness by introducing them to your Christian friends with similar interests.

With these two simple methods, the hack from togetherness to Christian unity becomes a reality.

## Exploration

# Love Unites Us

John 13:34, 35

### CONCLUDE

Unity within the Christian church proves the power of God. Love nurtures and sustains the growth of Christian unity. Jesus reminded the disciples that people would know that they were His followers if they loved one another (John 13:35). The Holy Spirit ignites and sustains the love Christians must have in order to reveal Christ's gift of salvation and the hope of eternal life with Him. Others will join our movement, not because they like our doctrines but because they desire the sweet peace, the living hope, and ultimately the powerful love of Jesus that is manifested through our unity.

### CONSIDER

- Illustrating the concepts of love and unity and how they work together by using mixed media art.
- Writing a play or skit that illustrates the importance of unity in the church.
- Praying for unity in your church, humbling yourself, and asking God to make your attitude and contributions a catalyst for unity and not a stumbling block.
- Observing natural habitats to understand the unity found in God's creation.
- Discussing the inhibitors that destroy unity and how to prevent each one.
- Planning activities to build unity in your church—small group Bible studies in homes, outreach projects, social gatherings, celebrations with food and games, and group excursions.

### CONNECT

1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:11–13; Colossians 3:13, 14; Psalm 133:1. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 15; *Evangelism*, “Unity in Diversity,” pp. 98–103.

Carl P. Cosaert, *Galatians: A Fiery Response to a Struggling Church*, chapter 13.

Ganoune Diop, “What Does God Say About Unity?” *Adventist Review*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story3332-what-does-god-say-about-unity>.