

# lesson eleven

DECEMBER 8–14

## Unity in Worship

*“Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Revelation 14:6, 7, NKJV).*



When Jesus comes, we will no longer be separated from our brothers and sisters by earthly boundaries but will worship God together as a family.

Rev. 14:7;  
John 4:22–24;  
Hab. 2:20

## Introduction

# *Can't We All Just Get Along?*

After a big argument or Facebook debate there is an unavoidable sentiment that lingers or is even stated audibly from a bystander who says, “Can’t we all just get along?” As we millennials like to say, let’s be real and get to the fundamental questions to be answered: How can we be united to finish the work when we have issues of disunity based on culture, worship styles, instruments, and other preferences? And is there any hope for us to be united when we have conflicts?

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### **We see the everlasting gospel going out loudly and clearly.**

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One direct answer is found in the first angel’s message as a two-step process. In this initial message, we find the everlasting gospel going all over the earth with the same message proclaimed: “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV). We see the everlasting gospel going out loudly and clearly.

First, to unite, we need to have and proclaim the everlasting gospel loudly. If we do not possess the message and proceed to have a shouting match between different messages, this will not bring unity; it will bring meaninglessness, discord, and confusion.

Second, we must worship together for unity to happen. Unity is seen when we worship together toward our Creator God. So then, how and where do we worship Him? The *how* is answered by Jesus in John 4:22–24, speaking to the woman at the well: “ ‘You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. . . . The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him’ ” (NKJV). We need to worship in spirit and truth.

The *where* is found in Habakkuk 2:20, “ ‘The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.’ ” We ought to be in church to worship together. Through this week’s lesson we will unfold more principles and ways to unite through worship!

## Logos *Unity in Truth*

John 17:17–21;  
1 Cor. 6:19, 20;  
Heb. 10:24, 25;  
Rev. 14:1–14

### ***United by Worship (Acts 2:1–4, 40–42, 46, 47)***

The apostles and early Christian believers experienced a unity that is unparalleled to this day. After Acts recounts the message Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, it tells us that three thousand souls were added to the church. It continues to share that these three thousand people were also in one accord. What was the secret to their unity? Acts 2:42 says “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” What is it that united the early Christian church? To put it succinctly, worship. The time they spent in studying the message of the apostles, fellowshiping with one another, and praying caused them to have a unity that hasn’t existed since.

### **What was the secret to their unity?**

### ***Unity in the Everlasting Gospel (Rev. 14:1–14)***

Acts is not the only book that pictures God’s people worshipping God in unity. Revelation 14 is one of the most beautiful chapters in Scripture. It can be outlined in three major sections. Verses 1–5 describe God’s last-day people, who are united in “follow[ing] the Lamb wherever He goes” (NKJV). Verses 6–12 detail God’s last-day message of warning and mercy, which His people are united in proclaiming to the world. The end of Revelation 14 shares what happens when God’s people are united in Jesus and His message: Jesus comes back to take His people home. God’s last-day people, focused on His message and His mission, are able to be united with Jesus in the clouds of glory with all who have chosen to yield to the grace of God.

### ***Unity in the Message (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Rev. 14:6, 7; 4:8, 11; 5:9–13)***

In order to experience the unity that God’s people have in Revelation 14 we must understand the messages that are so central to them. How does the idea of “fear God and give him glory” (Rev. 14:7, NABRE) lead us to unity? When we fear God and give Him glory, we are following the pattern of the angelic hosts who rest not day or night in praising the Lord. When we glorify Him with the words we speak and the way we live our lives, our worship becomes one with the worship of heaven. When we glorify God by joyfully following His will, we are demonstrating that God is, indeed, the only One who is worthy of our allegiance. We deem Him worthy, or worth our obedience—so we “worth-ship” Him. The focus of the first angel’s message is to bring us into unity with God’s order of worship, which unifies God’s people.

***Worship the Creator (Exod. 20:8–11; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Luke 4:16; Heb. 10:24, 25)***

The injunction given to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV) is a direct reference to the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:11). In this call to worship the Creator, God reminds us to worship Him in the way and on the day He instructed us to in the beginning; namely, on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the sign that God is sanctifying us and bringing our hearts into unity with Him. It is impossible for us to worship God in unity if we are not united with Him. The Sabbath is a time of corporate worship when we are to come together to encourage one another in the faith. This united worship is critical for the spiritual growth and unity of the believers.

***Unity in Truth (John 17:17–21)***

Why are the three angels’ messages crucial for unifying God’s people? In one of Jesus’ last recorded prayers He focused His attention on the believers’ need for unity. He was about to be crucified and would shortly ascend back to heaven, and He understood that His people must be one in purpose. Unity could exist only as they were sanctified, or set apart from the world, and united with God. Jesus pleads with His Father, “Sanctify them by Your truth” (John 17:17, NKJV). Jesus knew that if His followers were not sanctified by the truth of His Word, they would never be united. How can we experience unity today? It can happen only as we are united in the true message God is calling us to know, understand, and share at this time: the three angels’ messages. How could we ever be united as a people of God if we are not united in the message He is calling us to take to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people? If we are not united in the great truths of these messages, all unity in our worship would simply be shallow and artificial.

***Two United Groups of Worshipers (Rev. 13:1–4, 8; 14:6, 7, 9–11)***

Revelation depicts two groups who are united in worship. Chapter 13 tells of one group who is united in the worship of the beast, his image, and the dragon. Chapter 14 describes those who are united in following the Lamb and His final message to a lost and dying world. The sole purpose of the first group is to coerce people to worship the image of the beast (Rev. 13:15), while the second group’s sole mission is to point people to the true worship of the Creator God. The first angel’s message is an urgent call for God’s people to unite with Him in worshiping God in the way He instructed them and not to participate in the divisive worship of the beast. In this injunction to worship the Creator, Jesus is calling His sheep who are not yet part of the fold to unite with His true followers before it is too late. Revelation depicts one remnant group who is completely united in their worship of God. These are the true worshipers who worship Him in “spirit and in truth.”

***REACT***

1. How can we know which group we are united with?
2. Is unity more important than truth?

## Testimony

# Set Apart for Unity

Acts 2:47;  
Eph. 4:3-5

“The first angel’s message of Revelation 14, announcing the hour of God’s Judgment, and calling upon men to fear and worship Him, was designed to separate the professed people of God from the corrupting influences of the world, and to arouse them to see their true condition of worldliness and backsliding. In this message, God had sent to the church a warning, which, had it been accepted, would have corrected the evils that were shutting them away from Him. Had they received the message from Heaven, humbling their hearts before the Lord, and seeking in sincerity a preparation to stand in His presence, the Spirit and power of God would have been manifested among them. The church would again have reached that blessed state of unity, faith, and love, which existed in apostolic days, when the believers were of ‘one heart and of one soul,’ and ‘spake the word of God with boldness,’ when ‘the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.’ Acts 4:32, 31; 2:47.

**“You cannot love God and yet fail to love your brethren.”**

“If God’s professed people would receive the light as it shines upon them from His Word, they would reach that unity for which Christ prayed, that which the apostle describes, ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’ ‘There is,’ he says, ‘one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.’ Ephesians 4:3-5.”<sup>1</sup>

“What is it that causes dissension and discord? It is the result of walking apart from Christ. At a distance from Him, we lose our love for Him, and grow cold toward His followers. The farther the beams of light recede from their center, the wider separated they become. Each believer is as a beam of light from Christ the Sun of righteousness. The more closely we walk with Christ, the center of all love and light, the greater will be our affection for His light-bearers. When the saints are drawn close to Christ, they must of necessity be drawn close to each other, for the sanctifying grace of Christ will bind their hearts together. You cannot love God and yet fail to love your brethren.”<sup>2</sup>

### REACT

1. Uniformity is usually mistaken for unity. What attitude should you cultivate to be united in Christ and yet celebrate diversity in one body?
2. If correct understanding of the Scriptures and nearness to Christ are necessary for unity in worship, what practical steps should you be taking?
3. Is church unity an end in itself or a crucial precursor to the successful mission? Discuss.

1. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 379 (emphasis in the original).

2. Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15, pp. 88, 89.

Acts 17:10, 11

## Evidence *More Than a Song*

Worship consists of many different components and can take many forms, but it is often reduced to singing. Worshiping God includes recognizing His attributes (Rev. 4:8), acknowledging what He has done for us (Rev. 5:9, 10), and giving Him glory and honor (Rev. 4:11; 5:13). As such, we worship God by studying His Word in order to get to know Him and be able to discern His attributes, praying prayers of thanksgiving, recognizing how He is working in our lives, and singing of His goodness and lifting Him up. The word translated *worship* that is used in Revelation is the word *proskuneo*, which means “to pay homage, show reverence, or to kneel down before.” Although singing can contain attributes of worship and worship is often expressed through song, worship must consist of much more than that.

### I “can sing all I want to and still get it wrong.”

In Acts 17, Luke briefly mentions the Bereans, a group of people that is often commended in churches for their diligent Bible study. What we know about them comes from just two verses, but we see that they were open and eager to receiving the Word and at the same time diligent in their study of the Scriptures, making sure any new teachings were in line with the God they had come to know.

Acts 17:11 says that “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily.” Unlike some of the Jews in Thessalonica, the Bereans were ready and open to new revelations but not accepting them naïvely. How often do we fall into the trap of taking the preacher’s word at face value without bothering to go directly to God’s Word for verification and reinforcement, coming to a personal understanding of who God is? This personal understanding of God forms the basis of our worship. We cannot truly worship God without knowing what He is like, having an unquenchable desire to seek Him out, and in response, spending consistent quality time with Him through prayer and the study of His Word. As Ross King writes, I “can sing all I want to and still get it wrong. Worship is more than a song.”<sup>1</sup>

### **REACT**

1. What are some other ways we can worship God besides prayer, Bible study, and singing?
2. What is your own personal “song” of praise, the one that no one else can sing, not even the angels in heaven, only you? One that expresses your daily life, your purpose, and personal experiences?

1. Ross King, “Clear the Stage,” . . . *And All the Decorations, Too*, Ross King Music, 2002.

# How-to The Worship Equation

Rev. 14:6–11

Before His ascension, Jesus prayed for His followers to be unified (John 17:11, 21–23). As Christ's disciples, we may be tempted to try to concoct a facade of unity. We may even be tempted to think that unity is, in and of itself, proof that we are Christ's disciples.

Moreover, we narrowly view worship as the hour or two spent at church once a week or, worse still, as music that has lyrics related to spiritual things. Unity in worship would then translate to uniformity in the order of church service or in the musical instruments used. But is unity really achieved when we robotically act the same?

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## Worship = whom you worship + how you worship.

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United in falsehood: while unity is an admirable trait, the story of the Tower of Babel illustrates that it is possible to be united with a common goal that is anti-God (Gen. 11:1–9). The presence of unity, then, is not equivalent to holiness. We can be united in unholy, false worship.

*Elements of worship.* The worship we are called to in Revelation 14:6–11 comprises two elements: (1) whom you worship (verses 6, 7) and (2) how you worship (verses 9–11). As an equation, this would read: worship = whom you worship + how you worship. We are called to worship the Creator God “that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (verse 7) “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24) with our thoughts and actions (i.e., “in his forehead, or in his hand” [Rev. 14:9]).

*Just one true worship.* There are as many false permutations of the worship equation as there are variations of the terms. For instance, you could know who the true God is but not worship Him correctly (cf. Mal. 1:6–8). He has instructed us in Scripture how to worship Him. On the other hand, there are many false gods, and the only way to know the true God is from the Scripture.

*Biblical unity in worship.* The goal, then, cannot be mere unity in worship. We should seek to unite in worshiping the true God in the way He has asked us to as revealed in His Word. A group of people who come together to study the Bible in a spirit of humility, willing to renounce anything contrary to His Word, is sure to experience Pentecostal unity (cf. Acts 2:1).

### REACT

1. Can you unite in worship with someone you theologically disagree with?
2. How do you know when you've crossed the line from unity to uniformity?

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Rev. 14:7

## Opinion

# Separated to Unite

When it comes to relationships, healthy compromise isn't only a good thing . . . it's a necessity! Think about it. Without being willing to give up preferences and opinions, most couples would never agree on their kitchen countertop color or the name of their next child. But while compromises on preferences are essential, there is a compromise that is never safe for the Christian—compromise of principle. Standing firm for the truths of God's Word was literally what led the three Hebrews into the fiery furnace, Daniel into the lions' den, and millions of Christians into the fires of persecution. Summarizing this loving but firm stance, Martin Luther said, "Peace if possible, truth at all costs." Luther not only recognized that truth was worth being divided over but that by its very nature truth separates.

### God separates . . . but in order to unite.

Jesus Himself, the living embodiment of the truth, said that He "came not to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34, NLT). He foresaw family members being divided over the Truth—by their own decisions to accept or reject Him and His teachings. While God is a God of unity, He is also a God of separation. At Creation, on three of the six days we find God dividing for the sake of order and life (Gen. 1:4, 6, 14). And when God *re*-creates us at conversion, He separates us from our unhealthy hobbies or friends, in order to grow us in Him. God separates . . . but in order to unite.

At the end of time, once again God divides to unite. Through His truth He separates His children from the world—separates us from compromised Christianity—in order to unite us to each other and to Himself. Meanwhile, through a truth-compromised unity, Satan will manage to gain worship for himself: "And *all the world* marveled and followed the beast. So *they worshiped the dragon*" (Rev. 13:3, 4, NKJV; emphasis added). So the Creator's last message of invitation and warning goes to every corner of the planet—"Fear God and give glory to *Him . . . and worship Him!*" (Rev. 14:7, NKJV; emphasis added). "*Don't worship* the beast or his image!" (see verse 9). Both groups will be united in worship—but only one will be united in the truth.

### REACT

1. What are some things in your life that you're not willing to compromise for the sake of peace or unity?
2. What are some ways you find God giving you opportunities to stand for principle in your day-to-day interactions?

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# Exploration

## *Bind Us Together*

Acts 4:23–31

### CONCLUDE

In Acts 4:23–31 we see the disciples coming together to pray in earnest. After this united prayer the Holy Spirit descended in power! We see unity in that interaction, and we see something deeper. We are not to unite for the sake of unity and fellowship; we unite because it is vital in the work that we seek to do as Christians. To proclaim the good news of Christ, His love, and His soon return we must pray and work together as never before. It is also important that we keep Christ as the basis of our unity and fellowship. Through studying the Scriptures and praying we can have daily experiences with Christ, individually and as a church, in a powerful way that will change the communities we are in and change the world. And as we experience unity and relationship with Christ, we can experience unity and relationships in the church.

### CONSIDER

- Planning a dinner and Bible study where you invite members of your youth group or church community, ensuring that prayer is central to your gathering.
- Making an art piece about the power of fellowship and prayer and sharing it with a friend or family member. Be creative and use whatever medium you would like.
- Meditating on ways that you can personally increase godly fellowship and unity in your church and journaling about them and, then, searching for ways to implement those ideas.
- Going back and reading the Bible verses and stories from this week, and as you do so, analyze and write down the components needed for unity in worship and fellowship.
- With a group of friends, designing a skit based on the lesson to perform at your church or youth group.
- Composing a poem, in any form you would like, speaking about the importance of fellowship and how that strengthens unity in the church.
- Assembling a group from your church to develop prayer partners. Pray together regularly, and meet together socially to share a meal with your prayer partner from time to time.

### CONNECT

Acts 1:14; 2:42; 12:12; Philippians 2:2; 1 Peter 2:5.

Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, "Unity in Faith and Doctrine," pp. 192–195; *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2, "The Training of the Twelve."

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