

Examples of Agreement in the New Testament Church



SABBATH—OCTOBER 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 1:12–14; Acts 2:5–13; Acts 2:42–47; Acts 4:32–37; 2 Corinthians 9:8–15.

MEMORY VERSE: “The apostles [leaders and teachers] were doing many miracles and signs [works that were proof of God’s power]. And everyone felt great [much; a lot of] respect for God” (Acts 2:43, ICB).



“Jesus first brings a person to Himself. But then He always joins that person to other believers in His ‘body.’ ”—Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), page 91, adapted.

PEACE happens in the church when members know Jesus. Jesus is the Truth (John 14:6). When church members know Jesus, then they also build strong friendships with each other. That is exactly what happened with the first Adventists. Their experience in Jesus joined their hearts as one. Their friendships helped them stay strong in the Lord when they tried to understand why Jesus did not come back in 1844. That experience started the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It also helped Adventists learn that before Jesus comes back again, He will judge everyone who lived on the earth.

After Jesus went to heaven, His followers prayed and studied the Bible together. Their experience shows us God’s power in their lives. Their experience also led to peace and agreement between people who were very different from each other. We can have that same experience today.

“Jesus first brings a person to Himself. But then He always joins that person to other believers in His ‘body.’ Jesus’ ‘body’ is a word picture for His church.”—Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), page 91, adapted.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS GET READY (Acts 1:12–14)

Jesus makes His followers a promise before His death. He promises them that He will never leave them alone. God will send them the Holy Spirit who always will be with them. The Spirit will help Jesus' followers do God's work. The Spirit also will help them remember many things that Jesus said and did (John 14:26). The Spirit will guide Jesus' followers to find more truths (John 16:13). Before He leaves the earth, Jesus again promises His followers that God will send them the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8). The Spirit will help them witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and everywhere else on the earth (Acts 1:8).

In Acts 1:12–14, we learn about the things that Jesus' followers did for 10 days to get ready for the Holy Spirit. What did Jesus' followers do to get ready?

“Jesus' followers wait for God to send them the Holy Spirit as He promised to do. They empty their hearts of pride. They feel deep sorrow for their sins. They turn away from their sins. They remember the words that Jesus said to them before He died. Now they understand better the meaning of Jesus' words. They start to remember truths that they forgot. They share these truths with each other. Each person scolds himself or herself for not really understanding Jesus. Jesus' followers remember His wonderful life. They think about how clean and holy Jesus' life was. They feel that nothing that God asks them to do or give up for Jesus is too much or too hard. They are willing to suffer anything in the future because their lives show people that Jesus is a beautiful Person. Oh, if only Jesus' followers can live the last three years over again! They want to see Jesus again so that they can show Him that they love Him deeply. They want to show Him how they are very sorry for making Him sad because they showed no faith in Him. But Jesus' followers feel better when they remember that God forgives them. They decide to do everything they can to show that they have a lot of faith in Jesus now. They will bravely confess the truth about Jesus to everyone on the earth. . . . Jesus' followers stop arguing and disagreeing with each other. They let go of the wish to be first and rule over each other. Then they join as one heart in Jesus.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, pages 36, 37, adapted.



The Spirit will guide Jesus' followers to find more truths (John 16:13).

THE DAY WHEN GOD Poured OUT HIS SPIRIT (Acts 2:5–13)

After Jesus went to heaven, His followers got ready for the Holy Spirit to come. God poured His Spirit on Jesus' followers at Pentecost. Pentecost is a special Jewish festival. When God poured the Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers, they were "all together in one place" (Acts 2:1, NLV) during Pentecost.

In Bible times, Pentecost was one of three big feasts that every male in Israel celebrated. Pentecost happened 50 days after Passover. The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word "pentekoste," which means "50th day." During the Feast of Pentecost, the Hebrews offered God the first summer crops from their gardens and farms. They offered these crops to God in thanksgiving and joy.

We think that the Feast of Pentecost in Jesus' day also included a celebration to help God's people remember the time when God gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1). If that is true, then what does that celebration of the law show us? It shows us that God's law continues to be important to the Christian message about Jesus. That helps us understand why one of the most important verses about the end times tells us about both the law and the Good News about Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

Now let us look more closely at what happened when God gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16–25; Hebrews 12:18). God gave Moses the law during Pentecost many years before Jesus lived on earth. Moses' experience helps us understand better what happens when God pours His Spirit on Jesus' followers during Pentecost in the New Testament. You can read about what happened at that Pentecost in Acts 2:2–4. Do you see that many of the miracles in Acts are the same as the ones that happened when God gave Moses the law?



God pours His Spirit on Jesus' followers at Pentecost. Then Jesus' followers start speaking in languages they never knew before. This miracle starts to bring the human family back together again.

Acts 2:5–13 describes what happens at Pentecost. What does this powerful experience mean?

People see God's power when Jesus' followers start speaking in languages they never knew before. Jews who came from other countries heard the message about Jesus in their own language. In a way, what happened at Pentecost helps end the separation that happened at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). This miracle starts to bring the human family back together again.

JESUS JOINS US IN ONE BIG FAMILY (Acts 2:42–47)

In Acts 2, Peter preaches a sermon. When he finishes, he asks people to turn away from sin and accept Jesus. Almost 3,000 people decide to accept Jesus as their Savior! God works in the hearts of all these people. Many people who lived far away learned about Jesus. Maybe they came to Jerusalem with the hope to see Him. Or maybe they heard Jesus' messages in the past. But they did not become His followers until Pentecost. Pentecost is the special time when God poured His Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers after Jesus went back to heaven. At Pentecost, God helps Jesus' followers to tell other people about Jesus. They start to tell everyone that Jesus woke up from the dead. Jesus' followers also tell everyone that God will forgive their sins because of Jesus (Acts 2:38).

Acts 2:42–47 talks about the many things that Jesus' followers did together as a church. What helped the church to join as one and do all these wonderful things?

What is a wonderful way to help new believers grow in spiritual power? The answer is Bible study. Bible study was the first thing that the new believers did. They joined as one group to learn what Jesus' followers taught. Jesus commanded His followers to make new believers and teach them Bible truth (Matthew 28:20). The community of new believers spent time learning all about Jesus from the apostles. The apostles were the men that Jesus chose to lead His church after He went back to heaven. The apostles taught the new believers all about Jesus' life and work, His teachings, His picture stories, sermons, and miracles.

The new believers also spent time praying and eating together. Prayer is an important part of spiritual growth. Does the believers' eating together mean they took part in the Lord's Supper? Or does it mean they shared meals together, as Acts 2:46 seems to say? The Bible does not tell us exactly. But the things that the new believers did show us an important truth. They spent time together in the temple and in their homes. They were close friends. They shared life together. They worshiped together all the time.

What can this example of the new believers teach your local church about agreement, friendship, and witnessing?



Prayer is an important part of spiritual growth.

THE GIVING HEART AND THE SELFISH HEART (Acts 4:32–37)

In the book of Acts, Luke tells us about something wonderful that happened because of the deep friendships in the church. Luke says that the new believers shared all things that they owned with each other (Acts 2:44, 45).

The new believers did not share their things with each other because someone forced them to. No. They shared everything with each other because they loved each other and because they were close friends. Their sharing shows us that they knew Jesus. The new members supported each other in this way for some time. Luke tells us more about it in Acts 4 and 5. The Bible gives us other examples of sharing, as we will see next in the story about Barnabas.

Barnabas seems to be a rich man who owned land. He sold the land to help the Christian community. Then he brought the money to the church leaders (Acts 4:36, 37). Barnabas is an example for all Christians to follow.

Read the story about Barnabas in Acts 4:32–37. Now read the story about Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1–11. Why did Ananias and Sapphira behave the way they did?



The new believers shared everything with each other because they loved each other and because they were close friends. Their sharing shows us that they knew Jesus.

Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit. They also were very covetous. Covetous means that you want more than you need or you want something that does not belong to you. Ananias and Sapphira were more than covetous. They were greedy too. Greedy means that you have a strong and selfish wish to have more money and own nice things. Selfishness and being greedy often can destroy Christian friendship faster than any other sin. But Barnabas is an example in the church of someone who was unselfish and had strong friendships with other Christians. Ananias and Sapphira are completely different from Barnabas.

The 10th commandment in God's law is about being covetous. It is a sin hidden in the heart (Exodus 20:1–17). The sin of being covetous does not start with our actions. When we covet, it starts in our minds and thoughts. A selfish heart is seen in selfish actions. Selfish thoughts cause Ananias and Sapphira to lie to God.

How can we avoid being covetous? How can our thanking God for His gifts help us to not be selfish? Why is a thankful heart powerful “medicine” for this evil?

REMEMBER THE POOR (2 Corinthians 9:8–15)

The new believers shared all that they owned with each other. Their loving spirit showed the agreement and peace that lived in the New Testament church. But the sharing found in the first chapter of Acts did not end there. Later on, Paul invited the churches he started in Macedonia and Achaia to collect money for the poor in Jerusalem (read Acts 11:27–30; Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:26; and 1 Corinthians 16:1–4). Most of the members in those churches were not Jewish. Their gift of money shows us how much the non-Jewish believers loved and cared for their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Yes, the Jewish and non-Jewish believers were different in many ways. They had different ways of life and came from different race groups and countries. But even so, they all joined together as one “body” of believers in Jesus. They all loved and believed in the same message: the Good News about Jesus. When the non-Jewish churches shared with the poor Jewish members in Jerusalem, they showed unity. Unity is agreement in mind, heart, and belief in Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 9:8–15, Paul tells us that the church at Corinth is very giving. What good things does Paul say will happen because of their unselfish hearts?

The unity that the church had in Paul’s day shows us what we can do today. But unity does not happen on its own. All believers must be willing to help someone every day.

What spiritual things in the New Testament church made unity possible? The answer is prayer, worship, Christian friendship, a shared purpose or plan, and Bible study. The new believers also understood that they were responsible for loving and caring for each other. Their agreement in these things led them to take care of members in their own church and the needs of members who were far away.

“The giving spirit in the New Testament church showed that God gave them His loving-favor and that they were putting His gift to good use. What caused the church to share and give so much? It was the Holy Spirit who made their hearts holy and loving. Both believers and people who did not believe saw the loving behavior of the New Testament church. In everyone’s eyes, the behavior of the new believers was a miracle from God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 344, adapted.



Most of the members in Macedonia and Achaia were not Jewish. Their gift of money shows us how much the non-Jewish believers loved and cared for their Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Pentecost [the time when God pours His Holy Spirit on His church],” pages 35–46, in *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*.

“What was the reason for the giving and sharing that the new believers did [in Acts 2:44, 45 and Acts 4:32–35]? It was caused by the Holy Spirit. God poured His Spirit on Jesus’ followers. Then the new believers who accepted the Good News were joined as one in heart and mind. They had the same plan. They wanted the work that God gave them to be a success. Selfishness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brothers and sisters in Jesus and their work for God was more important than their love for money and things on this earth. Their works show that they thought that the souls of men were worth more than riches.

“The same thing will happen when the Spirit of God takes control of a person’s life today. People with hearts full of Jesus’ love will follow His example. For us, Jesus became poor. Jesus gave us His riches. Money, time, and the power to change people’s lives are all gifts that God gives us. But these gifts have real value only when we use them to share the Good News about Jesus with other people. The New Testament church shows us this truth. Today, believers can show to everyone on earth that the Spirit’s power has helped them to change. They can show that the Spirit’s power helped them to stop loving the things on this earth. Believers also can give up things to help other people learn about the Good News. When other people see these changes happen in our lives, the truths we share will have the power to change the lives of everyone who learns these truths.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 70, 71, adapted.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What were the reasons for the agreement that the new believers in Jesus experienced? How can we, as a worldwide church today, have the same experience? What do we need now that Jesus’ first followers had before?
- ② The New Testament churches collected a big offering to help the poor in the Jerusalem church. How does their gift show us what we should do today? What things can local churches do in their communities to help the poor and other people in need?