

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality

The Holy Spirit and the Church

Lesson #9 for March 4, 2017

Scriptures: Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:5-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3-7; Acts 2:4-11; 17:11.

1. There are very few human organizations that exhibit true unity. Do you know of any? Is it possible for a world-wide church to exhibit unity? What could make that possible?
2. When we think about the work of the Holy Spirit, we usually think about His work on individuals. How does that impact the church? Unfortunately, we like to count numbers. Every five years at General Conference time, there is a lot of discussion about how the different divisions are doing in terms of baptisms. Are we trying to suggest that the growth of the church is primarily a result of our missionary activities? Certainly, God wants the church to grow; He wants to cooperate with us in bringing that about. But, if we believe that the great controversy is an essential part of the message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we must recognize that it was God who has already won the great controversy; He did it all alone.
3. As we mentioned earlier in our series, the primary work of the Holy Spirit has been the work of inspiring prophets to write the books of Scripture and in modern times the writings of Ellen White.
4. So, how does the Holy Spirit create a holy, spiritual community? Does He act directly on the individual members? Or, is it through the revelation and inspiration of the Bible? Would a church survive and prosper if none of its members had the fruit of the Spirit and no one had any gift or gifts of the Spirit?
5. Let us not forget that Christ was, and is, and forever will be, the Head of the church. (See Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23.) It is through what has been accomplished by Jesus Christ that we are able to be adopted as sons and daughters of Christ. Our justification as well as our sanctification come through faith, that is, our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is through our relationship with Him that we are able to live victorious lives. And, finally, at the time of His second coming, we will be able to join Him in the clouds through glorification.
6. So, in what ways does the Holy Spirit unite us with Christ? Since sanctification and justification are both accomplished by faith, does that mean that our faith somehow involves the Holy Spirit? Is He the designated channel for our faith? Couldn't we have trust in Jesus or even the Father directly? Remember that the Greek word *pistis* can be translated *belief, faith, trust, or confidence*; and faith comes by hearing. (Romans 10:17)
7. Read Ephesians 2:18,20-22; and 1 Peter 2:6-7. Compare Matthew 16:13-20. Do you agree that the work of the Spirit on an individual level leads to a specific community of faith: The church? What is the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit"? (2 Corinthians 13:14, *NASB*) What does it mean to be built up as members of the new spiritual house of God "in the Spirit"? (Ephesians 2:22, *NASB*) Ephesians 4:3 tells us that we should be eager "to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (*NASB*) How are we like "bricks" in the church of God?
8. How does the Holy Spirit promote unity and peace in the church? Do you see that happening in your local church today? Do you see that in our larger church organization of Seventh-day Adventists? Do you see a lot of unity in the church at each level?
9. Read Colossians 3:12-14. How can we be more forgiving and loving to other church members? We are to treat other church members with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. What would happen if we all did that? Heaven on earth?
10. Read 1 Corinthians 12:13. One of the very few sacraments that Seventh-day Adventists

recognize is the sacrament of baptism. When we choose to be baptized before the church, Paul suggested that we have been baptized into one body and drunk of the one Spirit. We have not only joined the church of God, but also we have joined a local church. It is God's intention that we become members of that organization and feel a fellowship with those who worship there. How many people really understand baptism when they are baptized?

11. What are the relationships among our individual connection with Jesus Christ, our faith, and our connection with the church? Do these ever come into conflict? Should they? Research has shown repeatedly that for members to join and remain committed to the church, they must: 1) Feel that they are a part of a relatively small group of believers, and feel a genuine fellowship with that group; 2) Believe in the teachings of the church; and 3) Get involved in serving the church in various ways. They need at least two of these three.
12. Read Romans 6:3-7. Paul suggested that when we are baptized, the old man of sin is buried with Christ, and a new Christian is raised to life with Him.

Baptism is a most solemn renunciation of the world. Self is by profession dead to a life of sin. The waters cover the candidate, and in the presence of the whole heavenly universe the mutual pledge is made. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism, and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present.—Ellen G. White Comments, (*MS 57*, 1900); *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1074.8; *FLB* 146.3. Compare *Testimonies*, vol. 6, 91.3 (1900); *Ev* 307.2; *LHU* 302.4.

13. Did your life change completely when you were baptized? Many of us who were raised as Seventh-day Adventists were baptized when we were relatively young. Do we even remember many of the details of that event? Is there a place for re-baptism? Or, does the Communion service once every three months serve that function? When we are baptized, we are acknowledging the fact that we want our lives to be guided by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. True baptism involves true repentance, a crucifixion and renunciation of the old life, and a new birth or conversion. How do you feel about your personal baptism? Has your Christian experience grown from that day onward? It should grow daily!
14. Read Acts 17:11; and John 5:39,46-47; 8:31-32. Surely, these verses make it clear that true Christians will constantly be studying and learning from the Bible. Any new idea will be tested by the Word of God. The Bible is our main connection with God. It is through the Bible that God speaks to us; through prayer we speak to Him. This is how we maintain a conversation with God. The Word of God is the primary means by which the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ and with the church. The Bible must always be the ultimate authority in determining truth; it is the way we get to know Jesus Christ and the will of God.
15. We are told that Paul commended the Bereans as being more noble than those in Thessalonica because they constantly studied and searched the Scriptures to find out if the things they had been taught were true. (Acts 17:11) Have you ever seriously questioned your pastor?
16. Do you find that there is serious Bible study going on in your church? Does it happen during Sabbath school? Are the sermons full of serious Bible study? Or, do they sometimes seem more like entertainment? Or, even sometimes seem quite boring?
17. In His prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus talked about the unity He hoped would characterize not only His disciples but also those who later would believe in Him through their word. The only way we can share in the experience of the disciples is by a careful study of God's Word.

If many church members had the kind of relationship that Jesus prayed for in John 17, would it take a long time before He could come again? Why has the second coming been so long delayed already? (See *Evangelism* 694-697.) It is now more than 172 years since 1844!

18. If the Holy Spirit is primarily responsible for giving us the Bible, would we expect Him later to contradict what is written there? Do we as a world-wide church remain united in our understanding of the Bible? How much time do each of us spend in studying the Word of God each day and each week?

Ephesians 4:4-6 (GNB): ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. ⁵There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶there is one God and Father of all, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

19. How do we go about studying the Bible? Do we drink in the truths of the Bible with an earnest desire to obey, as far as possible, what it teaches? Do we really understand it? What about different translations or versions? Is the Holy Spirit in all of them?
20. Do you see the truths of Scripture being universally understood and believed by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Or, do differences in culture and beliefs cause significant differences among church groups? Could we do as William Miller did in his Bible study?
21. This lesson is focused on how the Holy Spirit can bring unity into the church. How does that actually happen? Is it one of the spiritual gifts? Is that a one-time event? Or, does it require constant attention and work on the part of the Holy Spirit to keep the church reasonably unified? Surely, none of us would seriously question the idea that the theological foundation of our unity as a church is in the Word of God. Are there teachings found in Scripture that you have a hard time accepting?

We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The gospel of Christ is to reach all classes, all nations, all tongues and people. **The influence of the gospel is to unite in one great brotherhood. We have only one Model that we are to imitate in character building, and then we all shall have Christ's mold; we shall be in perfect harmony; nationalities will blend in Jesus Christ, having the same mind, and the same judgment, speaking the same things, and with one mouth glorifying God.**—Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* 171.2; *15MR* 361.1-2. [Bold type is added.]

22. Are we fooling ourselves when we believe that it is possible to have real unity in a world-wide church with all the differences in attitudes and cultures? Could we “with one mouth glorifying God” stand as united members of the one church? (See quotation from Ellen White above.)
23. Read Acts 2:4-11, 16-21. What was the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the early rain at Pentecost? Peter suggested that what happened was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. By the time of Pentecost, the disciples realized that Jesus was God! Ellen White suggested that following that experience, the disciples could speak fluently and convincingly in whatever language they were working.

“There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” During the dispersion the Jews had been scattered to almost every part of the inhabited world, and in their exile they had learned to speak various languages. Many of these Jews were on this occasion in Jerusalem, attending the religious festivals then in progress. Every known tongue was represented by those assembled. This diversity of languages would have been a great hindrance to the proclamation of the gospel; God therefore in a miraculous manner supplied the deficiency of the apostles. The Holy Spirit did for them that which [40] they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime. They

could now proclaim the truths of the gospel abroad, speaking with accuracy the languages of those for whom they were laboring. This miraculous gift was a strong evidence to the world that their commission bore the signet of Heaven. **From this time forth the language of the disciples was pure, simple, and accurate, whether they spoke in their native tongue or in a foreign language.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* 39.2-40.0. [Bold type is added.]

24. The events of Pentecost were amazing. The Holy Spirit led out in a revival and reformation that has been, so far, probably unmatched in history. And what was the result? Read Acts 2:42-47. The Christians seemed to have developed a kind of communal existence; they shared everything. What would it take for us to have that kind of experience?

The Pentecost mission enterprise was accompanied by a number of other factors where the early church stood united. They were united in Bible study and continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings (*Acts 2:42*). They were united in fellowship and the breaking of bread, possibly a reference to united worship (*Acts 2:42*). They were united in prayer (*Acts 2:42*) and in praising God (*Acts 2:47*). They were united in serving those in need when they freely shared what they possessed and had all things in common (*Acts 2:44, 45*). United Bible study and fellowship will result in the desire to share the good news with others and to help others in very practical ways. The Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the needs of those around us.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Thursday, March 2.

25. Many people sold their personal property in order to support the larger group. Did they do that because they believed that Jesus would be coming back again very soon? Or, was it love?
26. As individual local churches of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, what are we doing to help reveal the unity of our church? What more could we be doing?

This is the work in which we also are to be engaged. Instead of living in expectation of some special season of excitement, we are wisely to improve present opportunities, doing that which must be done in order that souls may be saved. Instead of exhausting the powers of our mind in speculations in regard to the times and seasons which the Lord has placed in His own power, and withheld from men, we are to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, to do present duties, to give the bread of life, unadulterated with human opinions, to souls who are perishing for the truth.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, 186.1. Compare *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1892, par. 3; *2SM* 23.1; *6BC* 1051.5; *YRP* 320.4.

Every individual is striving to become a center of influence, and until God works for His people, they will not see that subordination to God is the only safety for any soul. His transforming grace upon human hearts will lead to unity that has not yet been realized, for all who are assimilated to Christ will be in harmony with one another. The Holy Spirit will create unity.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 25b*, 1892; *Home Missionary*, November 1, 1893, par. 20; *Selected Messages*, book 3, 20.3-21.0; *LHU* 296.3; *YRP* 123.3; *MR311* 48.3.

27. What are the factors that hinder our development of this kind of unity based on the Holy Spirit's work within our individual churches? Could it be that, as Ellen White suggested above, "every individual is striving to become a center of influence"?
28. Could we, like Jesus, learn to love others as Jesus loved us? We need to look out for each

other's interests. In order to truly do that, we must give up our selfish ambitions. Why is that so difficult for us as sinful human beings?

29. There are those who suggest that our unity must be in service not in doctrine. They point out that even minor differences in doctrine tend to divide people. But, if we all work toward a common belief based on solid evidence from the Word of God, would not that have a unifying effect? The shared belief in shared teachings is one of the binding characteristics of faithful church members.
30. Nevertheless, there will never be a time this side of the heavenly kingdom when we will be fully in agreement on all details of our beliefs. Can we learn to love others as Christian brothers and sisters even if they have minor differences with us? How do we determine if a difference is minor or major? Is something major if it causes a split in the church? Are we exhibiting the humility and rejection of selfishness necessary to be a part of a unified church? So, how does the unity inherent in the work of the Holy Spirit actually take place? If we are drawn daily nearer to Christ, we will inevitably be drawn closer to each other!
31. As you have experienced membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, what attitudes seem to promote unity? What attitudes seem to destroy unity?
32. With regard to our beliefs, if we choose to move independently from God's Word, we will soon find ourselves moving apart from other members; and unity would then be impossible.
33. Some have described the Christian experience involving Jesus Christ not only as our Savior but also as our Lord. What does that imply? If Jesus Christ is the Lord of our lives, wouldn't we be fully in harmony with others who have experienced something similar?
34. We must remember that one of the main tasks of the Holy Spirit is to testify of, and give glory to, Jesus Christ. (John 15:26; 16:14) How should it impact our lives when we compare the way we are currently living with the pattern we find in Scripture? If we are united with Christ, will we not be united with other Christians who, in turn, are united with Christ?
35. The apostle Paul spoke of the church as being like a human body with different members serving different functions. He also spoke of the Christian church as being like a building fitly joined together. We can only view with amazement ancient structures like the pyramids or like the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Huge, enormous blocks of granite were cut and prepared so carefully as to fit so tightly together that one cannot insert even the thinnest piece of paper between them. How did they accomplish that?
36. Would you agree that the only possible way to have unity in the church is for all members to be striving to be Christ-like? How important is baptism in establishing unity in the church?

The book of Acts is one of the most thrilling books in the entire Bible. Seemingly against all odds, the New Testament church exploded in growth. From a small group of fledgling believers in Acts 1, early believers grew to become a mighty force in the Roman Empire. There were 3,000 added to the church at Pentecost (*Acts 2:41*). The record states that another 5,000 men (*Acts 4:4*), in addition to women and children, were baptized shortly after this initial baptism. Acts 6 adds that "the Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly" (*Acts 6:7, NKJV*).—*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 121-122.

37. It is very interesting to notice that not only Pharisees (*Acts 15:5*) but also priests (*Acts 6:7*) joined the early Christian church in large numbers.
38. The experience at Pentecost seems to suggest that people had been visiting Jerusalem from

all parts of the world and accepted the Christian religion. Yet, for some reason, the believers did not seem to want to leave Jerusalem until, finally, they were forced to do so because of persecution. (See Acts 8:1.)

39. The Christian church became a very cross-cultural church. Think of Cornelius who was a Roman Centurion; Philip baptized that Ethiopian eunuch; Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, was baptized by Paul in Philippi; Paul and Silas baptized the jailer in Philippi who was, no doubt, a Roman citizen. That kind of growth shattered the “us versus them” beliefs of the Jewish people.
40. Considering how the disciples up until the time of Christ’s death were constantly fighting over who would be the one who would be the one closest to Christ in the earthly kingdom, isn’t it incredible to see how their attitudes changed after crucifixion weekend and later at Pentecost.

Under the training of Christ the disciples had been led to feel their need of the Spirit. Under the Spirit’s teaching they received the final qualification, and went forth to their lifework. No longer were they ignorant and uncultured. No longer were they a collection of independent units or discordant, conflicting elements. No longer were their hopes set on worldly greatness. They were of “one accord,” “of one heart and of one soul.” Acts 2:46; 4:32. Christ filled their thoughts; the advancement of His kingdom was their aim. In mind and character they had become like their Master, and men “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” Acts 4:13.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* 45.2. Compare *Ed* 95.5; *RC* 42.3.

Then was there such a revelation of the glory of Christ as had never before been witnessed by mortal man. Multitudes who had reviled His name and despised His power confessed themselves disciples of the Crucified. Through the co-operation of the divine Spirit the labors [96] of the humble men whom Christ had chosen stirred the world. To every nation under heaven was the gospel carried in a single generation.—Ellen G. White, *Education* 95.6.

41. The New Testament church exploded because every church member considered it his personal responsibility to spread the gospel as much as possible. Could we do the same today?
42. Could you write out several foundational principles that might enhance the unity of your Sabbath school class? Or, even your local church?
43. The Bible Study Guide suggests these as foundational principles: (1) The guidance of the Holy Spirit, (2) A commitment to Christ, (3) Faithfulness and commitment to Scripture, (4) Social fellowship, and (5) A passion for witness and service. Would you agree with these ideas? How could we as individual church members or perhaps as members of a Sabbath school class promote these principles?
44. We know that as the end of time approaches, the Devil will be more and more desperate to introduce his ideas into the church to prevent the unity which will be necessary to finish the gospel. As church members around the world, we must look to the Spirit-inspired Word of God as the only true foundation for unity. If someone should arise, taking some kind of extreme theological view or position without a firm foundation in Scripture, s/he will only bring division to the church. We can be sure that the Holy Spirit is not leading that person.

© 2017, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: January 15, 2017

Z:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\Holy Spirit\SS-9-Holy Spirit-2017_03_04-Fin+.wpd