



"And now I am no more in the world,
but these are in the world..." (John 17:11).

Use this recent news story to help your students see the relevance
of this week's lesson from the Standard Lesson Commentary®
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A NATION DIVIDED

The 114th Congress of the United States formally convened on Tuesday. *Convene* means "to come together," but Congress has not done much coming together in recent years—at least not philosophically. *Polarized* seems to be the most apt description of the American political landscape. Politicians and the citizens they represent seem more divided than ever in their views regarding the proper role and size of government, among other things. With both houses of the legislative branch controlled by one major political party and the executive branch controlled by the other, many observers expect deadlock.

A CHURCH UNITED?

Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers. He did not desire unity merely for the sake of unity, however, but unity for the sake of a world needing to hear his message of salvation. Most of the world still doesn't know the savior, and historically "Christian nations" continue to turn away from him. The fragmentation of the church over its 2,000-year history hasn't helped! Unified believers is what Jesus prayed for, but his desire has not been realized.

1. How can Christians best address the spirit of polarization in politics? Or should we merely ignore it? Why?
2. What does Jesus' prayer for the unity of his followers signify today on the personal, local, regional, and national levels?
3. What are some issues that stand in the way of Christian unity?
4. Considering the differing concepts of *unity*, *unification*, and *uniformity*, which should Christian most be striving for? Why?
5. How does unity at the level of the individual Christian affect the church's witness?
6. What attitudes do you need to change personally in order that Jesus' desire for unity will not be hindered?

—Charles R. Boatman

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