

Unity

F. A. Hughes.

JULY/AUG 1974

The pursuit of "Unity" is a prominent feature of religious circles at the present time. We do not here pronounce upon the "ecumenical movement" amongst the established denominations — the book of Revelation shows *its* progress and ultimate end. There is, however, a much more intimate exercise as to unity which merits careful attention. Let us add, too, the urgent desire for intelligent prayer lest this important movement becomes affected by the questionable principles of ecumenicity.

The actual word "Unity" is found but three times in the Scriptures — once in Psalm 133 and twice in Ephesians 4; the word in the original language is however translated many times in the Old Testament as "together." Sometimes this word is used to describe the movements of divine Persons as in Isaiah 40 — "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;" Jeremiah 31: 13 depicts a scene of mourning turned by Jehovah into joy in which both young and old shall untie together. Typically, too, we have a most precious reference in Genesis 22 — father and son moving "together." The word is also used in relation to the boards of the Tabernacle (Exodus 36) — again a most blessed typical truth. Ezra 4: 3 speaks of the united stand of God's people against the enemy's effort to disrupt their construction of the temple. Alas! in Psalm 2 (and elsewhere) we see the kings and rulers of the earth moving together "against the Lord, and against His Anointed" — a unity of evil which has sadly persisted and will persist (cf. Acts 4: 26, 27; Revelation 17: 12-14). Blessed indeed to hear the words of the Psalmist — "Oh magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His Name together" (Psalm 34: 3).

The reference in Psalm 133 comes towards the end of "A song of degrees" — an *upward* movement fraught with many exercises — painful and pleasant — culminating in the "night" (for us the present night of Christ's rejection) being filled with the praise of God. Significantly the "Song of degrees" follows Psalm 119 in which there are over 170 references to the word, statutes, testimonies, etc., of God. Truly these are the towers and bulwarks "of Zion" to be acquainted with and counted (Psalm 48). Beloved brethren, are we not thus challenged? Are *all* our movements towards unity of the brethren (Psalm 133) and towards praise issuing from *all* the servants of the Lord (Psalm 134) the result of God's word having its rightful place in our affections? It would be well to meditate upon this "Song of degrees" — seeking help as we observe the various experiences and exercises of the Psalmist — his appreciation of mercy; sense of forgiveness; deliverance from distress; fear of Jehovah; recognition of the sphere from which necessary help came, and indeed much besides. Such experiences with God (the true bearing of the Psalms) produce the happy state of soul seen in the opening of Psalm 131 — "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." Ah! beloved, if there is to be healing amongst the saints *according to the mind of God* all self importance, self assertion and *all* of self must go. Only so can the Ark find its rightful place (Psalm 132). Christ, and Christ alone must be the gathering point for His people; His Name in all its power and preciousness, not ours, must give its own peculiar character to every movement — the true Ark in its true place, enshrined in His people's hearts. All else is extraneous and will militate against true unity. *Our* thoughts and efforts may bring about outward uniformity — but only the unselfish service of hearts that appreciate mercy and seek no proprietary rights, desiring that Christ may be pre-eminent amongst His own, can in any wise further the objective of "brethren dwelling together in unity." It is significant that David in Psalm 132 merges his *personal*

exercise (vv. 1-5) into a *collective* setting — carrying with him the desire of others. Independent action, apart from the fellowship of one's brethren, will never succeed in promoting unity amongst some meetings of believers. Let us eschew the ecumenical principle of amalgamation. Let us also be careful not to overstress by recapitulation the failures of the past; may we be helped in the power of the Holy Spirit of God to refuse self and to magnify Christ in our movements, desiring that the affections of the Lord's people may be drawn more definitely to Himself and thus be found in unity amongst themselves. The true basis for unity is found in the first five verses of Philippians 2. May every effort, every approach made be the outcome of meditation upon those words.

Approaching this truth in the abstract we see the unity of the Godhead in the first verse of Scripture. "In the beginning God" (ELOHIM — *plural* which in Hebrew indicates three) "created" — a verb in the *singular*; one single objective, a principle throughout Scripture. How blessedly seen in the words and movements of Christ in John's gospel, the Sent One of God whose every word and deed was in full accord with the will of His Father, and yet He withal "over all, God blessed for ever" — the Eternal Word! As we in adoring worship meditate upon this glorious, yet ever subject One, shall we not more fully understand His holy desires expressed in John chapter 17?

Ephesians 4 speaks of unities which already exist, the fruit of divine love and purpose. The essential features marking those who are exercised to "keep the unity of the Spirit" are given to us in verse 2 — "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." The precious ministry coming to us by way of the gifts given from the ascended Christ has in view our arriving "at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (v. 13). These precious spheres of unity are inviolable — the product of the Spirit of God; as marked by the features necessary for their enjoyment we shall be greatly helped in the pursuit of practical unity amongst the people of God.