

The Unity of the Spirit

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From a Meditation on Ephesians 4: 1-6

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It is evident from the exhortation in verses 1 to 3 of this passage that the spirit in which we consider our subject of "the unity of the Spirit" is an urgent qualification. May God grant that we may first judge ourselves in respect of any tendency to harshness or ungraciousness; and also in regard to placing our earlier conceptions of that unity above anything that the Spirit would teach us through the Scripture.

The words in italics at the commencement of verse 4 (i.e., "There is") are better omitted. The seven details which follow are not a statement of dogma or doctrine, but rather give us a complete picture of that unity of the Spirit which we are to endeavour to keep.

The unity of the Spirit is a unity formed by the Spirit of God, and maintained by the Spirit's power alone. It certainly includes all true believers on our Lord Jesus Christ in this Christian dispensation. But here they are not viewed as a mere aggregate of individuals who are forgiven sinners, but as a vast number of souls in whom there is distinguishable the work of the Spirit of God. There is still the flesh in every one of them; but in the unity of the Spirit no flesh is included. They are seen therefore, from the point of view of what the Spirit has wrought in them — "the Spirit is life" (Rom. 8: 10). There is a new life and nature wrought in them, distinct from what they were as born of Adam. What they were in Adam has been entirely set aside in the death of Christ, and what they are in Christ Jesus is wholly new and there is nothing of Adam or of the flesh carried into it. They are the same individuals, but viewed as men of a new race in Christ, and as having a new life in the Spirit. It is when viewed in this life and nature that the Scripture speaks of them as brought into the unity of the Spirit, which unity we are to use diligence to keep. No thought or word or deed that emanates from the flesh or from man in Adam has any part or lot in that. In the new creation "all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5: 16-18).

ONE BODY

In considering the unity of the Spirit, its features or elements, this is the first thing; that Christians all the world over are one body (Romans 12: 4, 5). A number, or multiplicity of bodies, is unknown in, and is foreign to, the unity of the Spirit. To form Christians into parties or organizations of

any kind whatsoever may be done in ignorance or wilfulness; or with evident zeal in promoting a cause, or furthering a service or upholding a doctrine; but whatever the motive, it is dividing them into sections and is contrary to keeping the unity of the Spirit. A "national church" for example is necessarily an organization affecting one nationality as distinct from other nations. A church, carrying the name as identified with a person or place or system of worship, in its very essence is contrary to the unity of the Spirit. That Christians are in it may be true, and that their being in does not invalidate them as Christians is also true; but to be in it or to join it is not using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This unity is not on a national basis, as though comprising only those of one nation, nor is it on an international basis as though arriving at some common and international agreement among Christians. It is a unity of the Spirit, but the grace that saves them constitutes them members by the reception of the Spirit. They have not to join one Body, they have not to agree to become one Body; but they are one Body. It is not thus a voluntary association, but an organic formation by the work of the Spirit. To be consistent with the fact is our business; not to form one Body but to be consistent with it.

It is by one Spirit that we are all baptised into one Body; and together we all form the Body of CHRIST. The body of any creature is formed for the outward expression of the life within. Christ in Heaven is our life; and the one Body is His Body, composed of all its members the world wide, and is a vessel in which He expresses Himself in His life and ways here on earth.

ONE SPIRIT

Indwelling the one Body there is one Spirit, He of whom the Lord spoke in John 14: 16, 17. He is a Divine Person, equal with the Father and the Son, who can be in every saint, and also indwell the whole Church of God on the earth. The conviction of our sin has been His work; we are born again of the Spirit. By Him we have our knowledge and enjoyment of the love of God; our experience of deliverance; our enlightenment; the formation of our nature and character in Divine life; our acquaintance with Christ and of all the truth concerning the Father and the Son, and also our place in the Assembly. All is His work in us and there is but ONE SPIRIT whose operations are ONE and the same in all saints everywhere all the world over. He glorifies CHRIST in Christ's body.

ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING

Our calling is one. It is the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3: 14). It is a holy calling (2 Tim. 1: 9). It is a heavenly calling (Heb. 3: 1). It is a calling which takes us out of earthly associations, for it is not of earth but entirely of that which relates to heaven. At the same time, while it gives us a new citizenship in heaven, we are instructed to be subject to the powers that be on earth.

In our calling we have new bonds and relationships so that, whether Jews or Gentiles, we are now joint heirs of a joint body and joint partakers of God's promise in Christ by the Gospel. It produces a common bond, stronger than any other bond and binds us into one common interest, giving us one common object, however diverse we have been naturally in rank, attainment, privilege or colour. It is not yet perfected fully in accomplishment, for we are to be with CHRIST where He is and like Him, but the HOPE of its complete fulfilment is a hope common to us all.

ONE LORD

The unity of the Spirit gives us to be under one Lord. This forbids us, in Divine things, to own any other Lord and certainly not to call any man such. Ecclesiastical dignitaries in some bodies are addressed as "My Lord." Wherever this is done, it is losing sight of and setting aside, the unity of the Spirit which knows only one Lord.

His is the title as risen and exalted by God (Acts 2: 36). By Divine decree every knee must bow to Him; every tongue confess Him, Lord (Phil. 2: 11). We who believe in Him now are brought to confess Him (Rom. 10: 9) to our eternal salvation. We prove His power and authority in all details of our life. He, as such, is our present Saviour. To us there is one Lord (1 Cor. 8: 6). The Assembly is under His administration in each and every place (1 Cor. 12: 5). His authority exercised in one locality is binding in all places, for the unity of the Spirit recognises but one Lord in all localities. His will commands obedience, but it is the obedience of love, for who amongst His own does not love the Lord and, if loved, no less honoured. There are many voices in the world, but our ears are open to one supreme voice. His protection is sufficient: His word is authoritative.

ONE FAITH

The unity of the Spirit maintains all saints in one faith. It is "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" (James 2: 1). It is not a blend of the faiths of the world at which some professing Christians aim. It is unique. It is not a development of religious science, an outcome of philosophic thought.

It is based upon miracles:

The intervention of Divine power in the midst of a world of sin,

The incarnation of the Son of God,

The revelation of God in Man,

The cross and death of Jesus,

The resurrection,

are all Miracles. The glorification of the Man Christ Jesus; the coming of the Holy Spirit from Heaven, forming believers on the ascended Christ into one Body; the Gospel concerning Him, so adapted in its perfection to any and every child of Adam in every land; these are all unique. The calling of the Church, its equipment, its resources, its functions are incomparably blessed as set out in the Christian faith. The return of the Lord Jesus in power — so imminent — whether in the first instance to fetch the Church out of the world, or in the second instance to institute His Kingdom over the world as prophesied ages ago, is clearly included in the one faith. The blessedness of the knowledge of God, revealed as Father and all His counsels too with regard to Christ His Son, may well impress our hearts and minds with the magnificence and comprehensiveness of the One Faith, outside and independent of all the "faiths" of the world. It is utterly exclusive of any assimilation to any other faiths or co-operation with them. It is the TRUTH and stands alone, impregnable as God Himself.

ONE BAPTISM

The one baptism is necessarily Christian baptism and is our committal to all that is involved in the truth of Christ Jesus (Romans 6: 3). It announces our identification. with the death of our Lord

Jesus Christ in all its bearings and implies our obligation to walk in newness of life. The water under which we are passed is an emblem of death and an understanding of our identification with Christ dead and risen again, teaches us that we are no more at liberty to be under sin's dominion, no more available for sin's control. He — Christ — lives unto God; every pulsation, every movement of His risen manhood is Godward; for the accomplishment of God's will and pleasure.

We likewise esteem ourselves to be alive in Christ Jesus to GOD. Living under new control, only for the will of God (Romans 6: 11). He, in His death, has died out of this world system, working out the eternal purpose of God. Deliverance from the time system, this world's system, is also our privilege, though for a period still having relationships, business, privileges here and responsibilities to fulfil — being permitted to be FOR GOD in them, but with our minds set on things above where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Colossians 3: 1).

ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL

The unity of the Spirit, in which we have our place and privilege even now, is in view of the completion of the whole scheme of God which He has designed for His eternal pleasure and complacency.

We are saved and blessed in Christ — not alone as a matter of mercy and philanthropy, but with a view to the setting out before all worlds and for eternity the ineffable blessedness of God's character; of the delight it is to Him to bless and of His purpose to surround Himself with a universe where everything will exhibit His attributes and with creatures redeemed and blessed, made capable of intelligent response to His love, wisdom and power and glory. He will be known as GOD indeed by all, supreme, purposeful, irresistible, triumphant, blessed beyond words, the vast creation rejoicing in the light of all that God is.

But in the unity of the Spirit He is known to us, not as God only, but also as FATHER, over all as God supreme, through all, over-ruling all conditions incidental to our time state, to the furtherance of His own designs, and in us all, whom He has given to Christ, sharers of His risen life, acceptance, relationship and inheritance.

We know Him who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever.
Amen.