

The Unity of the Spirit

GOD HAS MADE a unity for His saints and He enjoins us to endeavor to keep the unity. Like every other achievement wherewith God graces us, this unity is in spirit. To keep the unity is an individual matter, and should be the divine service of each saint. In this endeavor we ought not to have the idea that we are to establish a union with other saints, but simply seek that we do not mar the unity which the saints are constituted by God. Each saint is united by his spirit, and though the major problem of unity was circumcision and uncircumcision, yet even these have been united by God, for He has provided the tie of peace between these two elements. The chief parties of separation have been reconciled, and He in Whom are all our blessings is the Peace. Moreover, we have so learned Christ, having heard Him and been taught by Him, through His apostle Paul, that only the conduct of any saint ought to preclude fellowship. The spirit of our mind has been rejuvenated, and we have put on the new humanity, hence the requisite factors to keep the spirit's unity ought to be in being.

The significance of maturity is indicated by the unity of the spirit; it is a oneness first with Christ, the Lord, and so also between all the saints. To keep the unity we need to first acknowledge Him alone as our Lord, and hence of the details of our life. To see the unity only as embracing those who realize the special truths of Ephesians is to fail to understand the question. We may have more intimate fellowship with those of like understanding, but that is not the limit of the spirit's unity. In this respect the outward aspect is not in point, for whether outward unity be apparent or not, the spirit's unity is in being. Yet our obedience is to endeavor that we outwardly keep the unity, and to do so we ignore all other unities and associations, for any such alliances create but a superficial communion, which, in fact, amounts to division.

The spirit's unity is defined by, and based upon, seven features which are fundamental to the present economy, and therefore of the Ephesian epistle. Before each of these the word ONE is used, and so they are made thoroughly unique. These embody the saint's relationship to each other, and also to the Lord. Whilst each item has connection with both relationships, yet the first three, body, spirit, and expectation, refer most particularly to the saint's relationship to each other; then we have the central feature of the ONE Lord. The one faith and one baptism refer particularly to our relationship to the Lord, yet also linking us to the one God and Father. Both the Lord and God sustain a connection with each component, for They are the Creators of the one body which is united by the serene disposition of the one spirit and hence has the one expectation.

The figure here is of the saints' relation to one another; they are members of one organism, and they cooperate in mutual sympathy, being dependent and helpful according to the constraints of love. The established peace extends the illustration to the special feature of this economy which makes the body to be a joint-body, even though essentially the latter is based upon the vivifying, rousing and seating of an election from the nations and from Israel. This item of one body covers the members from these two divisions of humanity.

This is the loving and gracious disposition inculcated by the doctrine of the present economy; it displays the boundless grace and love which we have received from God and so accords with God's attitude. Thus the one spirit speaks of the quality of our mind renewed by God's teachings to us through Paul. They are the scale of our life's activity. The fact of our being one body necessitates this common spirit. It is not that we have the spirit of Christ, or are baptized by the spirit, but it is that the nature or character of our activities are those which accord with the truth of our being one body, and in this all factors of division, whether arising from the flesh or racial features, should be inert, for we have one spirit to exemplify the grace which is toward us.

This harmonizes with the one body and one spirit. In chapter one, verse eighteen, it is referred to as the prospect, which is the realization of our expectation. By the enlightening of the eyes of our heart, that is, the center of our being, we perceive the prospect to which we are called. And so we are able to understand that the *entry* into it requires means which constitute us to be pre-expectants in Christ Jesus. Hence we look to

meet the Lord in the air, and whilst so doing we wait for Him to call us to our citizenship which belongs to the heavens. We know He is able to do this. Our expectation is thus incidental to our calling.

The one body, one spirit and one expectation are features which concern unity as regards the saints' relationship to one another because they are Christ's and hence have one Lord.

This absolutely excludes any question of delegated authority in the spirit's unity. In this economy the evangelist, pastor or teacher, who accurately understands and honors the office, appreciates that he has no authority, and that his labors are entirely to dispense to and to up-build the saints. Beyond this the saints are peers of the one who ministers to them. Only the elders and supervisors represent Him in matters of order and discipline.

It ought to be obvious that the ONE Lord is the center and vitality of the spirit's unity. To Him we become related because of the one baptism by spirit. For Him we slave and accord Him the fullest and all rights and authority over us.

By the figure association this refers to the specific doctrine of this economy. It is spoken of in chapter one, verse fifteen; the faith (or teaching) which relates to you. This signifies that all ought to believe the same. And so we should, if all saints accurately appreciated this teaching and how it establishes Christ Jesus as Lord. The unity of faith should be attained through this teaching and the teachers, for both should direct us to our Lord, and to all His concerns in regard to this economy. Until we rise to the discriminations necessary to correctly partition the word of truth, we shall fail to achieve the unity of faith. Teachers ought to have established themselves in this respect before embarking upon their work, but few have the full-orbed view necessary, and generally are lacking in apprehending what is the faith which relates to the present.

This is no mere ceremonial matter, but a vital factor which makes real our unity with Christ. It is the baptism in spirit into His death and so into the life we have in Him. Thus we are cleansed and unified, sealed and made safe; the spirit makes its home in us, and we are enabled to acknowledge Him as our Lord, and to follow the lead of His spirit.

No one, in this economy, is commissioned to be baptizing; not even the apostle Paul was commissioned to engage in this. He was to preach the evangel, and it is through the preaching that the one baptism ensues, for the word of the evangel conveys this baptism to the chosen and shows that to them it is association with Christ Jesus in His death to sin and subsequent entombing and resurrection there-from. Thus one baptism gives us the spirit of life which is in Him and so His righteousness. All His glories become for us since relation to Him is an actual reality for us and for Him.

Such an item has special aptness in regard to the nations; those of Israel were well instructed as to ONE God and needed but to realize that their ONE God was also God of the nations. But the nations were atheists (without God Eph.2:12), yet had gods many (1 Cor.8:5). To the nations, then, this item would come with particular force; they have now One God and He is Father; unity is with Him and the Lord as well as with the saints. From Him come all blessings through Christ Jesus, and all conduct is before Him.

This ought also to correct orthodoxy on the subject of the Trinity. The crude notions of the nations were not fully shed, but were dressed in new form to apparently agree with some phrases of the scripture. Yet they missed the truth of ONE God and Father.

That God is also our Father is well known, but only in a superficial sense. Rarely do we find it understood with the full significance required by the evangel of God. The evangel has brought us the spirit of sonship; in this we should realize the tender affection God has for us, and the dignity and maturity afforded by our being sons of God, for we have passed from being merely children of God. To own God as our Father, in the sense required by God's evangel, is the highest expression of our faith which can be uttered by us. Its reality, in this economy, is

significant that we are His in that relationship which has its full height shown at the consummation, for it is to God, as the Father, that Christ Jesus our Lord becomes subject when relinquishing the Kingdom at the consummation. Such a feature emphasizes to us that God as our Father is no mere nominal expression, but rather it states the adulthood which comes to us through the glory of the evangel. Moreover, it indicates our submission to God since He is in fact our Father, caring for, providing for and loving immeasurably His sons.

The major barrier to our endeavors regarding this unity of the spirit is lack of obedience to our Lord. It ought to be within the apprehension of every saint that the word one precedes each item enumerated, and yet in the initial stage we appear to ignore it; later we lack the humility to adjust our faith and understanding to this fact, and rather do we adopt a degree of militancy to demonstrate our own particular views, with the result that demarcations are enlarged and so emphasized. Nay, we even might begin to formulate a demonstration that the spirit's unity was not purposed to be outwardly displayed until we meet our Lord, and so enter into our allotment and its participation. But it should be apparent that it is our own lack which has produced the existing situation; saints of prior generations failed before us, and we either follow them, or if we have any penetration and seek to adjust, then there comes a point when we also begin to spoil matters, even as did our fathers. Let us attain maturity and so glorify the unity God has made.

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