

The Unity of the Spirit

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THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Eph. iv. 3

This pamphlet is a sequel to the one entitled "The Doctrine of the Church as revealed to the Apostle Paul." Many souls have, more or less, apprehended the truth of "One Body and One Spirit," but have not yet grasped the force of the exhortation to connect their practice with this fundamental truth.

It is hoped that in the Lord's rich mercy this further paper may be helpful to souls.

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the [uniting] bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." Eph. iv, 1-6.

Here we find that there are unities connected with the Spirit, with the Lord and with God. I treat here of the unity of the Spirit, as being specially connected with the object of this paper. The observing of this unity is our responsibility: the others fall into their own places accordingly.

I would here remark upon the use of an expression which is often used to convey a right thought, but which is not found in Scripture, namely, "the unity of the body."

“ There is one body,” the unity of which is constituted by the Holy Ghost Himself, and we are exhorted to endeavour to keep the “ unity of the Spirit.” If we were exhorted to keep the unity of the body, we should be obliged to walk with every member of Christ, no matter in what association he might be found, or whatever his practice might be : no evil whatever would give us a warrant to separate from him. The endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit necessarily keeps us in company and association with a divine Person here upon earth.

Here I would note that which surely is so plain in the Word as to make one almost ashamed of having to insist on it, that is, the personal presence of a divine Person—God the Holy Ghost—here upon earth ; not only in each individual believer, but also in the Church of God. The individual believer is indwelt by the Spirit of God, anointed, sealed, baptized with all other believers into one body. The baptism of the Holy Ghost does not leave him an isolated person. Its action connects him with all other believers, so forming a body of which Christ is the Head. The promise of the Lord as to the Comforter was that He should not only be with them but in them. The Lord was with them : the Holy Ghost in His absence would be both with them and in them ; consequently the Holy Ghost at Pentecost not only “ filled all the house,” but “ there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire and it sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost ” (Acts ii, 2-4). He not only filled each one, but later on (in Acts iv, 31), at the gathering for prayer, He manifested His presence in their midst by shaking the place where they were assembled.

The saints are the body of Christ by one Spirit ; but they are also the “ habitation of God through the Spirit ” (Eph. ii, 22). God dwells amongst them, as we read in 2 Cor. vi, 16 : “ I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.” In being obliged to insist on this truth, we have almost come to the state of the men at Ephesus (Acts xix, 2)

who, in answer to the Apostle's question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" said: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" [or "We have not even heard whether the Holy Ghost has come"]. The state of things prevailing to-day makes it necessary to call attention to this important truth concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit both in the individual believer and in the Church of God.

If the Church of God were in a healthy state, there would be no practical difference between the two expressions, "unity of the body" and "unity of the Spirit." The Holy Ghost Himself dwelling in the Church constitutes its unity and practically embraces all the members of the body. If the Church were walking in the Spirit, the healthy action of the whole would be unimpaired. Still, the unity remains, because the Spirit remains, even when the oneness and healthy practice of the body as a whole is gone. The unity of a human body remains when a limb is paralyzed, but where is its oneness? The limb has not ceased to be of the body, but it has ceased to be in the healthy articulation of the body. Hence many Christians, while members of the body of Christ, are not endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

How then is the unity of the Spirit to be kept? What is "endeavouring" to do so? What is faithfulness to the nature of the Church, Christ's body, in an evil day? It is *Separation from Evil*. My first duty must be to "depart from iniquity." It may be moral or doctrinal evil, because evil assumes many shapes: I separate myself from it, to Christ. Thus separated, I find myself in the fellowship of the Spirit of God. He glorifies Christ and dissociates me from everything contrary to Christ; associating me with that which is according to Christ. The notion that I may be wittingly associated with an evil principle or doctrine or practice and yet be undefiled, is an unholy notion. I may be perfectly free from it myself, as not having imbibed it; but by practical association with it I have left the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

When we have separated from evil and are walking in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, Who is the Spirit of holiness and the Spirit of truth, we find others who are walking in the same way, and so we can be together happily in the unity of the Spirit. If there is a spot upon earth where the Lord can be in unhindered blessing, it is amongst those thus together, where nothing is allowed that is inconsistent with His presence in the midst or that can grieve or hinder the Spirit of God. It is not a question of how the saints may be together, but of a place where the Lord Himself may be in free and unhindered blessedness, to manifest His presence amongst those who seek to be faithful to Him in an evil day.

The primary step must be, " Let him that nameth the Name of the Lord depart from iniquity " (2 Tim. ii, 19). Members of Christ are mixed up with much evil on all sides. I must separate myself from such to walk in the fellowship of the Spirit, who keeps me in company with Christ. To Philadelphia Christ speaks of Himself as " He that is holy, He that is true " and the Spirit of God is the Spirit of holiness and the Spirit of truth. Holiness will not do without the truth, nor the truth without holiness. The absence of either is not of the Spirit of God.

Now in an evil day, when the faithful endeavour through His grace to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, the practice consistent with such unity must necessarily exclude all evil, while, in principle, it contemplates the whole Church of God. Wide enough to receive every member of Christ, all over the world ; narrow enough to exclude evil most carefully from its midst. Anything short of this is a sectarian principle and ceases to be of the Holy Ghost, while the principle in its breadth contemplates every member of Christ. Those gathered thus in the unity of the Spirit are jealous with godly jealousy lest anything should be admitted, either of doctrine or practice or witting association with such, that would put them practically out of the fellowship of the Spirit.

The effect of this "endeavour" is not confined to those who have come together in separation from evil and in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. Its aspect is towards, and has in view, every member of Christ in whatsoever association he may be. Those who are maintaining the truth are thus showing their truest and most faithful love to those who are not practically with them. Abiding in the light, in uncompromising fidelity to Christ, and in the fellowship of the Spirit of God—this is their truest love to their brethren. They do not compromise the light and truth of their position by leaving it for the darkness; but, if they have grace, they win their brethren into the light, to walk with them in the truth likewise.

A word here to my beloved brethren who have been called and honoured of God to occupy such a place in these last evil days. How deeply responsible are they that all their words and actions may so fully bear the test of the light and truth of God, that no occasion of stumbling be found in them to hinder their brethren in any wise. Let there be such simple blessed devotedness to Christ and His glory seen in them, that their brethren who are seeking God's path in the labyrinth around, may be drawn towards the truth and the place where Christ can freely be with His people. Let them be found in such a place in an evil day; let the character of their walk be simple and fervent devotedness to Christ; thoroughly dependent upon Him as conscious of their weakness; thoroughly devoted to Him and to that Church which He loves. I believe, if they were walking in the power and grace of the position they have been called to, that not alone their brethren who ought to be with them, but the world itself would have to own, "If aught be true on earth, that is!" The counterfeits of the enemy, too, would expose themselves. Let them ever be prepared to make much of Christ and of the path into which He has called them in special association with Himself, in His unspeakable grace; so that He may say to them: "Thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name." There

would then be a savour and a power in the simple fact that Christ was everything amongst them.

Through the Lord's great mercy, this endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace has been accorded to His saints, and many, seeing the pathway, have had faith to embrace it. When such is the case, the effort that some have made to take a place outside and independent of those who have thus been led to the Lord, is merely the self-will of man and to be treated as such.

If the simplest saints, as has frequently been the case, have been drawn together in the Lord's Name, even without any intelligence of the ground of the one body, they are of necessity bound with all those elsewhere who have been before them in the way and who may have learned more fully the divine ground of gathering. They may slip away very easily from it and get linked up with evil, if not watchful; and the enemy works incessantly to this end. But it is utterly untenable to suppose that they can intelligently maintain a divine ground of gathering and ignore what the same Spirit has wrought amongst others before them.

Scripture admits no such independency, especially when it is coupled with the profession of the truth of one body and one Spirit, without the practice flowing from such a truth. To maintain an independent position is to accept one which puts them practically out of the unity of the Spirit. Very probably such had come together at first in the energy of the Holy Ghost, simply gathering in the Name of the Lord. By falling into an independent position, they slip away from the company and fellowship of God's Spirit. They had begun in the Spirit and have ended, or are on the way to it, in the flesh.

Walking in the fellowship and unity of the Spirit involves distinct separation from all who are not in practice doing likewise. This tries the saints much at times. The enemy uses it to alarm the weaker saints. The cry of want of charity is at once raised. But when it becomes a ques-

tion of being in the fellowship of the Spirit of God, it ceases to be a question of "brethren" merely. If those who are otherwise holy in practice, will not walk therein; and others who have had light and grace given to them, do walk therein; this must involve separation on the part of the latter. To the flesh this is terrible. But human love must not be mistaken for divine love; and fellowship in the flesh for the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will not bend Himself to our ways or to our fellowship; we must bend our ways into practical fellowship with Him. Therefore the Apostle bids us add "to brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet. i, 7). Brotherly kindness will sink into mere love of brethren because we like their society, if not guarded by the divine tie which preserves it as of God. God is love and God is light; and "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." To exact brotherly love in such a manner as to shut out the requirements of that which God is (and He dwells in the Church by His Spirit) and of His claims upon us, is to shut out God in the most plausible way, in order to gratify our own hearts.

I beseech my brethren, as they value and love the Blessed One who gave Himself for His Church, to pause before accepting a position which must practically put them outside the unity of God's Spirit. The Lord Jesus gave Himself to redeem you; and not only so, but He died "that He might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John xi, 52). It ought to be on our hearts all day long, that what Christ died to gather is scattered. He will surely gather them in heaven; but He died to gather them together in one *now*. It cannot be but by keeping the unity of the Spirit; and if not thus, it is not what He died to effect. If it is not gathering with Christ, it is scattering, however plausible and well it may look in the eyes of men. God is working graciously in many places; and the enemy is working too, to try and mystify souls just emerging out of darkness and link them up with the principles of

neutrality, indifference and independency—anything but the truth.

God has in His grace gathered many saints together in the unity of the Spirit to the Name of the Lord, and has sustained them in the pathway through evil report and good report. To accept ground independently of that to which God had already recalled souls to walk in and act upon, is to forfeit the place in the unity of the Spirit which has been accorded of the Lord and to slip away from the fellowship of the Spirit of God.

The principle of the unity of the Spirit embraces the whole Church of God. The fact of those who have been mixed up with worldly systems, seeking fellowship, shows that they are separating themselves to the Lord. This should meet with a ready response. The more deeply we become conscious of the divine character of the place we have been called into by the grace of God, the more ready will be the response of our heart towards all the members of Christ. At the same time we will grow in the strength and conviction of the holiness that belongs to God's habitation through the Spirit; and, by His grace we will watch against the wiles of the enemy in seeking to let in that which would grieve the Spirit of God and hinder the Lord from identifying Himself with us and manifesting His presence in our midst.

The Lord in His mercy keeps His faithful ones true and devoted to Him in these evil days. They may be but a remnant, but two things have ever marked the faithful remnant at any time: *Devotedness to the Lord*, and *Strict attention to fundamental principles*. We find, too, that they were ever the objects of His special attention and care. Their very feebleness drew this forth the more strikingly. It was with them He identified Himself most specially. They have but a "little strength," but through His grace they have used it and have been brought into the place where He is. May the Lord give them to keep His word and not deny His Name; to hold fast that which they have, that no man take their crown. Amen.

APPENDIX

PRINCIPLES OF GATHERING

The resource for faith amid the confusion around is Matthew xviii, 20 : “ Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” But this cannot be pleaded to the exclusion of the truth of the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ. To come together pleading the promise of Matt. xviii, 20, and at the same time disowning the ground of the body of Christ, is a misapplication of the promise. This promise was given before there was any failure and before the truth of the one body was revealed. It embodies a fundamental principle and is the resource for faith when the manifestation of the one body by the visible oneness of its members, has failed. Faith in the unity of the Spirit in the one body as existing here on earth, is what we need the more. And then, when we cannot restore the state of things in Acts ii, to iv, because the oneness of the members is no longer in evidence, we have Matthew xviii 20 as a resource to be counted upon by faith. It needs but little discernment to see that the Spirit of God constitutes the body in unity by virtue of His presence therein ; and that He Himself would be disowning this, did He gather disciples apart from the principle of the one body or on any other ground.

Such being the ground of gathering, how solemn is the position of those who have attempted to set up another table claiming to be the Lord’s (sad to say, this has been done in some cases) and gather together another assembly in a place where the Lord’s table has been already spread in the communion of the body of Christ. If done in true-hearted ignorance, well : the Lord bears with such in

patient grace and instructs those who have a single eye. But if done knowingly, nothing can justify such an act. Nothing could alter the principle of those who are already gathered on the ground of the one body of Christ, unless something arose in their midst which denied the foundation truths of Christian faith, such as false doctrine touching the person or glory of Christ, or which showed indifference on such a subject, or which would be a denial of the truth of "One Body and One Spirit."

One has to bear with mistakes, and to seek, with grace and patience, to bring our brethren aright, if they have erred in judgment. But unless an assembly accepts as its line of action anything which would subvert the foundation truths of faith, it has its claim on me as an assembly of God. To set up another is to break practically, as far as I can, the unity of the Spirit, which I am exhorted to keep. If we have grace for it, let us labour, Nehemiah-like, to bring our brethren into the consciousness of their position, that they may "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and growing by the knowledge of God." And let us not by any act of ours render confusion more confounded.