

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 268

CHRISTIAN UNITY

*That they may be one,
even as we are one.*

John 17:22

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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268

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ONE BODY BY REGENERATION¹

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

SIN has not only alienated man from God, but man from man as well. Where there is no love to God there is no genuine love to our fellowmen. By nature, we are totally depraved,² and as such possessed of a radically selfish, evil, malicious disposition. “The poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways” (Rom 3:13-16). The record of human history consists largely of a solemn demonstration of that fact. Envy and enmities have marked the relationships of one nation to another, one party against another, one individual against another. Frictions and feuds have been the inevitable outcome of a covetous and ferocious spirit among men, were they black or white, red or yellow.

It is only the restraining hand of God that holds men within bounds and prevents the social sphere from becoming worse than the jungle. Every once in a while, that restraining hand is largely withdrawn; and then, despite all our vaunted progress, human nature is seen in its naked savagery. The truth is that men today are neither better nor worse than they were at the beginning of this Christian era. Speaking of God’s own people during their unregeneracy, the apostle described them as “serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). Such are men the world over, though they will not own up to it, nor can they be expected to. Since the natural man is ignorant of his inherent and inveterate³ enmity against God, it is not to be supposed that he is aware of harboring such a spirit against his neighbors. But if all the police were removed from this so-called civilized country, how long would it be before “hateful, and hating one another” was plainly and generally manifested!

Fallen man not only requires to be reconciled to God but to his fellows, and where the one takes place the other necessarily follows. Reconciliation, as was shown, is one of the fruits of regeneration; for at the new birth a new principle is imparted to its subject, so that his enmity is displaced by amity.⁴ “Everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him

¹ **regeneration** – God’s act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power.

² See FGB 247, *Radical Depravity*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ **inveterate** – long-established; habitual and ingrained.

⁴ **enmity...amity** – hostility replaced with friendship.

also that is begotten of him” (1Jo 5:1). The reconciliation of a soul to God entails his reconciliation to all saints. Since God has been reconciled to the entire church (considered as fallen) and its two main constituents (believing Jews and Gentiles) are made one, it follows that each Christian is, fundamentally, harmoniously united to all others. We say “fundamentally,” for the work of Christ has federally and legally united them. But that is not all. He procured the Spirit for His church and He—by the work of regeneration—makes them vitally one in a new creation. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1Co 12:13).

As the Christian’s reconciliation to God entails certain clearly marked responsibilities, so also does his reconciliation to all fellow-believers, and these are what we shall now be occupied with. Let us begin with that basic and comprehensive duty, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Concerning that simple precept there has been much confusion, both as to its meaning and requirement, with almost endless controversy about church union and divisions. Man, with his usual perversity, has changed that exhortation to “zealously attempt to make and enforce a human unity,” anathematizing⁵ all who will not subscribe and conform unto the same...

We do not propose to cover now the various efforts and devices of men since the Reformation to bring into existence organizations for unity and uniformity among professing Christians, both in creed and form of worship, such as state churches “by law established,” denominations that have laid claim to being the “true church” or “churches of Christ,” nor the high pretensions of those who rather more than a century ago denounced all sects and systems and alleged that they alone met on “the ground of Christ’s body” and “expressed” the unity of the Spirit, only to split up in a very short time into numerous factions and conflicting “fellowships.” No, our object here is not to be controversial but constructive...We cannot intelligently keep “the unity of the Spirit” until we rightly understand what that “unity” is; may He graciously be our guide.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, November 1946, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



⁵ **anathematizing** – pronouncing a curse upon.

EVEN AS WE ARE ONE

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.
—John 17:21-23

WHAT IS INTENDED IN THIS PRAYER: “That they all may be one” (v. 21). The same was said before: “that they may be one, as we are” (v. 11), and again [in] verse 22. The heart of Christ was much upon this. Some think that the oneness prayed for in verse 11 has special reference to the disciples as ministers and apostles, that they might be one in their testimony to Christ; and that the harmony of the evangelists and concurrence of the first preachers of the gospel are owing to this prayer. Let them be not only of one heart, but of one mouth, speaking the same thing. The unity of the gospel ministers is both the beauty and strength of the gospel interest. But it is certain that the oneness prayed for in verse 21 respects all believers. It is the prayer of Christ for all that are His, and we may be sure it is an answered prayer—“that they all may be one,” one in Us (v. 21), one “as we are one” (v. 22), “made perfect in one” (v. 23). It includes three things:

1. That they might all be incorporated in one body. “Father, look upon them all as one and ratify that great charter by which they are embodied as one church. Though they live in distant places, from one end of heaven to the other, and in several ages, from the beginning to the close of time, and so cannot have any personal acquaintance or correspondence with each other, yet let them be united in Me their common Head.” As Christ died, so He prayed, to *gather them all in one* (Joh 11:52; Eph 1:10).

2. That they might all be animated by one Spirit. This is plainly implied in this—“that they...may be one in us.” Union with the Father and Son is obtained and kept up only by the Holy Ghost. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17). Let them all be stamped

with the same image and superscription and influenced by the same power.

3. That they might all be knit together in the bond of love and charity, all of one heart. “That they all may be one”: (1) *In judgment and sentiment*:¹ Not in every little thing—this is neither possible nor needful, but in the great things of God, and in them, by the virtue of this prayer, they are all agreed—that God’s favor is better than life—that sin is the worst of evils, Christ the best of friends—that there is another life after this, and the like. (2) *In disposition and inclination*: All that are sanctified have the same divine nature and image; they have all a new heart, and it is one heart. (3) *In their designs and aims*: Every true Christian, as far as he is so, eyes the glory of God as his highest end and the glory of heaven as his chief good. (4) *In their desires and prayers*: Though they differ in words and the manner of expressions, yet, having received the same spirit of adoption and observing the same rule, they pray for the same things in effect. (5) *In love and affection*: Every true Christian has in him that which inclines him to love all true Christians as such. That which Christ here prays for is that communion of saints, which we profess to believe; the fellowship that all believers have with God and their intimate union with all the saints in heaven and earth (1Jo 1:3). But this prayer of Christ will not have its complete answer until all the saints come to heaven, for then, and not until then, they shall be *perfect in one* (v. 23; Eph 4:13).

WHAT IS INTIMATED BY WAY OF PLEA OR ARGUMENT TO ENFORCE THIS PETITION—THREE THINGS:

1. The oneness that is between the Father and the Son, which is mentioned again and again (vv. 11, 21-23). (1) *It is taken for granted that the Father and Son are one*—one in nature and essence, equal in power and glory, one in mutual endearments.² The Father loveth the Son, and the Son always pleased the Father. They are one in design, and one in operation. The intimacy of this oneness is expressed in these words: “thou...in me, and I in thee.” This He often mentions for His support under His present sufferings, when His enemies were ready to fall upon Him, and His friends to fall off from Him; yet He was in the Father and the Father in Him. (2) *This is insisted on in Christ’s prayer for His disciples’ oneness*: [1] As the *pattern* of that oneness: showing how He desired they might be one. Believers are one in some measure as God and Christ are one; for, *first*, the union of believers is a strict and close union. They are

¹ **sentiment** – opinion.

² **endearments** – expressions of love.

united by a divine nature, by the power of divine grace, in pursuance of the divine counsels. *Secondly*, it is a holy union, in the Holy Spirit, for holy ends. [It is] not a body politic³ for any secular purpose. *Thirdly*, it is, and will be at last, a complete union. Father and Son have the same attributes, properties, and perfections; so have believers now, as far as they are sanctified; and when grace shall be perfected in glory, they will be exactly consonant⁴ to each other, all changed into the same image. [2] As the *center* of that oneness: that they may be “one in us,” all meeting here. There is one God and one mediator; and herein believers are one, that they all agree to depend upon the favor of this one God as their [happiness] and the merit of this one mediator as their righteousness. It is a conspiracy,⁵ not a union, which doth not center in God as the end and Christ as the way. All who are truly united to God and Christ, Who are one, will soon be united one to another. [3] As a *plea* for that oneness: The Creator and Redeemer are one in interest and design; but to what purpose are they so if all believers be not one body with Christ and do not jointly receive grace for grace from Him, as He has received it for them? Christ’s design was to reduce⁶ revolted mankind to God. “Father,” says He, “let all that believe be one, that *in one body* they may be reconciled” (Eph 2:15-16), which speaks of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the church; that great mystery, “that the Gentiles should be “fellowheirs, and of the same body” (Eph 3:6), to which I think this prayer of Christ principally refers, it being one great thing He aimed at in His dying... “Father, let the Gentiles that believe be incorporated with the believing Jews, and make of twain [two] one new man” (see Eph 2:15). Those words, “I in them, and thou in me,” show what that union is which is so necessary, not only to beauty, but to the very being of His church. *First*, union with Christ: “I in them.” Christ dwelling in the hearts of believers is the life and soul of the new man. *Secondly*, union with God through Him: “Thou in me,” so as by Me to be in them. *Thirdly*, union with each other, resulting from these: “*that they [hereby] may be made perfect in one.*” We are complete in Him.

From *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*; in the public domain.

Matthew Henry (1662-1714): Presbyterian preacher, author, commentator; born at Broad Oak, England, UK.



³ **body politic** – politically organized body of people under a single government; state.

⁴ **consonant to** – agreeable; compatible.

⁵ **conspiracy** – combination of people to carry out a harmful act.

⁶ **reduce** – bring back; return.

THE UNITY CHRIST PRAYED FOR

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

That they all may be one.—John 17:21

THE most tender and touching prayer of the Master contained in this chapter opens His inmost heart to us. He was in Gethsemane, and His passion was just commencing. He stood like a victim at the altar, where the wood was already laid in order and the fire was kindled to consume the sacrifice. Lifting up His eye to heaven, with true filial¹ love gazing upon His Father's throne, and resting in humble confidence upon heaven's strength, He looked away for a moment from the strife and resistance unto blood which was going on below. He asked for that upon which His heart was most fully set. He opened His mouth wide that God might fill it. This prayer, I take it, was not only the casual expression of the Savior's desire at the last, but it is a sort of model of the prayer that is incessantly² going up from Him to the eternal throne. There is a difference in the mode of its offering; with sighs and tears, He offered up His humble suit³ below, but with authority He pleads enthroned in glory now; but the plea is the same. That which is desired while still below is that which His soul pants after now that He is taken up and is glorified above.

It is significant, beloved, that the Savior should in His last moments not only desire the salvation of all His people but should plead for the unity of the saved ones, that being saved they might be united. It was not enough that each sheep should be taken from the jaw of the wolf. He would have all the sheep gathered into one fold under His own care. He was not satisfied that the members of His body should each of them be saved as the result of His death. He must have those members fashioned into a glorious body. Unity lying so very near the Savior's heart at such a time of overwhelming trial must have been held by Him to be priceless beyond all price.

These words of the Savior have been perverted to the doing of a world of mischief. Ecclesiastics⁴ have fallen asleep, which, indeed, is their ordinary condition; and while asleep, they have dreamed a

¹ **filial** – having the character or relationship of a child.

² **incessantly** – unceasingly.

³ **suit** – earnest endeavor to obtain something.

⁴ **ecclesiastics** – church leaders, such as priests or members of the clergy

dream—a dream founded upon the letter of the Savior’s words, of which they discern not the spiritual sense. They have proved in their own case, as has been proved in thousands of others, that the letter killeth, and only the spirit giveth life. Falling asleep, I say, these ecclesiastics have dreamed of a great confederation, presided over by a number of ministers, these again governed by superior officers, and these again by others, and these topped at last by a supreme visible head who must be either a person or a council—this great confederacy containing within itself kingdoms and nations and becoming so powerful as to work upon states, to influence politics, to guide councils, and even to gather together and to move armies.

True, the shadow of the Savior’s teaching, “My kingdom is not of this world” (Joh 18:36), must have caused an occasional nightmare in the midst of their dream, but they dreamed on; and what is worse, they turned the dream into a reality, and the time was when the professed followers of Christ were all one, when looking north, south, east, west, from the center at the Vatican, one united body covered all Europe. And what was the result? Did the world believe that God had sent Christ? The world believed the very opposite. The world was persuaded that God had nothing to do with that great crushing, tyrannous, superstitious, ignorant thing that called itself Christianity. Thinking men became infidels, and it was the hardest possible thing to find a genuine intelligent believer north, south, east, or west. All professors were one, but the world believed not; the fact being that this was not the unity which Jesus had so much as thought of—it was never His intention to set up a great united body to be called a “church” that should domineer and lord everywhere over the souls of men and comprehend within its ranks kings, princes, and statesmen who might be worldly, ungodly, hateful, sensual, devilish. It was never Christ’s design to set up a conscience-crushing engine of uniformity. So, when it was brought to perfection and set to work with the greatest possible vigor, the great man-devised machine, instead of working out that the world should believe that the Father had sent Christ, wrought out just this: the world did not believe anything at all but became infidel, licentious, and rotten at the core. The system had to be abated as a common nuisance, and something better [had to be] brought into the world to restore morality.

Yet people dream that dream still: even good people do so. The Puritans, after they had been hunted and haled⁵ to prison in this country, fled to New England. [But] no sooner had they seated themselves upon

⁵ **haled** – hauled off; dragged forcibly.

the shore than they began to say, “We must all be one; there must be no schism,” and the big whip was brought out for the Quaker’s⁶ back, and the manacles⁷ for the Baptist’s bleeding wrists because these men, somehow or other, would not be one after this kind of fashion, but would think for themselves and obey God rather than man. Now-a-days, Dr. Pusey⁸ dreams that the Anglican⁹ and the Russian Church¹⁰ may be united, and then perhaps the Romish may chime in; and so once more all may be one. A mere dream! A mere chimera¹¹ of a kindly but whimsied¹² brain! If it should ever come to be a reality it would prove to be a upas tree,¹³ at the roots of which every honest man must at once lay his axe.

But what did the Savior mean, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me”? We must begin at the beginning. *What were the elements of this unity that Christ so anxiously desired?* Answer very distinctly is given to us in this chapter. The unity was to be composed of the people who are here called “they,” “that *they* all may be one.” Will you let your eye run down the chapter to see who “they” are? Look in the second verse: “That he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” The unity then proposed is of persons specially given to Jesus by the Father. Not then of all men who happen to dwell in any particular province, district, or city, but a unity of persons who have received, not common life as all have, but *life eternal*. Special persons, then, who have been quickened by God the Holy Ghost and have been brought into vital union with the person of the Lord Jesus are to be one.

Further, they are described in the sixth verse as persons to whom God’s name has been manifested, people who have seen what others never saw and have beheld what others cannot know. They are men given out of the world, so the verse tells us—chosen men, taken out from the ordinary mass—not, then, the mass, not kingdoms, states, empires, but selected persons. They are persons who have been schooled and have learned unusual lessons: “Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee” (Joh 17:7); and they

⁶ **Quaker** – member of the Religious Society of Friends founded by George Fox (c. 1650).

⁷ **manacles** – metal bands or shackles for fastening hands or ankles.

⁸ **Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882)** – English Anglican and prominent figure in the 19th century Anglo-Catholic movement, which adopted sacramentalism, baptismal regeneration, and other Roman Catholic doctrines.

⁹ **Anglican** – Church of England.

¹⁰ **Russian Church** – national church of Russia, an independent Eastern Orthodox Church.

¹¹ **chimera** – wild or unrealistic notion.

¹² **whimsied** – inclined to indulge in imaginary or unreal ideas.

¹³ **upas tree** – tree of the breadfruit family, from the forests of Java; its secretions are poisonous; therefore, deadly influence.

have learned their lesson well, for we find it written, “They have kept thy word...They have believed that thou didst send me” (Joh 17:6, 8). They are described in the ninth verse as being prayed for by Christ in a sense in which He never prays for the world at all. They are people, according to the tenth verse, in whom God is glorified, in whom the name of Jesus shines with resplendent¹⁴ luster. Look the whole chapter through, and you will discover that the unity which the Master intended was that of chosen persons who, by the Holy Spirit conferring life upon them, are led to believe in Jesus Christ—spiritual-minded men who live in the realm of spirit, prize spiritual things, and form a confederacy and a kingdom that is spiritual and not of this world...

Of what, then, is the one church of God composed? Is it composed of the Church of England, the Congregational Union, the Wesleyan Conference, and the Baptist body? No, it is not. Is not, then, the Church of England a part of the church of Christ, and the Baptist denomination a part? No...There are believers united with the Church of England who are a part of the body of Christ, and there are believers in all denominations of Christians, yes, and many in no visible church at all, who are in Christ Jesus, and consequently in the great unity...The spiritual unity is made up of spiritual men, separated, picked out, cleared away from all the mass with which they happen to be united. I have spoken very boldly, perhaps, and may be misunderstood; but I mean this: that you cannot take out any visible church, however pure, and say that, as it stands, it belongs to the spiritual unity for which Jesus prayed. There are in the visible churches a certain number of God’s elect ones, and these are of the body of Jesus Christ; but their fellow professors, if unconverted, are *not* in the mystical unity. Christ’s body is not made up of denominations, nor of presbyteries, nor of Christian societies. It is made up of saints chosen of God from before the foundation of the world, redeemed by blood, called by His Spirit, and made one with Jesus.

From *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, Vol. 12
(London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1866), 2-4.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion and the weakness of the church of Christ!—*J. C. Ryle*

¹⁴ **resplendent** – gloriously bright.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit
in the bond of peace.—Ephesians 4:3*

THE first matter that the apostle mentions is that we are to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Why did the apostle choose this as the first particular? The answer is to be found in the first three chapters of this epistle where Paul has been emphasizing this great principle of unity. He has said plainly and specifically in the tenth verse of the first chapter that this was the primary objective which God had in mind when He purposed, before the foundation of the world, and before time, to send His only begotten Son into this world. It was “that in the dispensation¹ of the fulness of times he might gather together in one [or that He might reunite in one] all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him.” This is the primary objective in God’s plan of salvation. Sin² is a disruptive force. Sin always divides, it always separates, it splinters. It divides a man within and against himself. It has produced the constant fight and struggle that we are all aware of in our lives. There is the constant problem of good and bad, right and wrong: shall I? shall I not? Sin also produces division between man and man; it leads to enmity, war, and strife. The world has been shattered by sin.

So, the central object of salvation, in a sense, is to reunite, to bring together again, to restore the unity that obtained before sin and the Fall produced this terrible havoc.³ The apostle has worked this out, saying in chapter 1, verses 11-13, “In whom also we [the Jews] have obtained an inheritance,” and then, “In whom ye [Gentiles] also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” Then Paul works it out in greater detail in the second chapter, showing how “the middle wall of partition” has been broken down and how “of twain [*two*] one new man,” one new body, has been made (2:14-15). This unity in Christ of Jew and Gentile, he says in chapter 3, is the

¹ **dispensation** – plan of salvation which God is bringing to reality through Christ, in the fullness of the times. (Arndt *et al*, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*)

² See FGB 209, *Secret Sins*; FGB 240, *The Sinfulness of Sin*; and FGB 247, *Radical Depravity*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ **havoc** – devastation.

mystery that has now been revealed (vv. 5ff). So, it is inevitable that when he comes to the particulars of the Christian walk and life, the preservation of this unity must be mentioned first. This is God's grand design; it is what displays God's glory above everything else. So, the peculiar mark of the Christian calling is that it preserves this "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"...The apostle shows the importance that he attaches to this question of unity by the fact that he continues to deal with it until the end of the sixteenth verse in this chapter...

Let us now observe how he deals with it by analyzing the statement...For the moment, we are concerned with the general appeal: "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:2-3). All who are abreast with modern trends in the Christian church will agree that there is no subject that is being talked about so much and written about so much at this present time as this question of unity. It is the age of ecumenicity,⁴ with endless talk and writing about unity, union, and reunion. How important it is, therefore, that we should consider what the apostle has to say concerning this theme. There is much loose talk regarding it; but our concern should always be *scriptural*. We must get to know exactly what the New Testament teaches about this matter.

The first thing, therefore, which we must look at is the character, or the nature, of the unity. We start by observing that the apostle is not merely appealing for some general spirit of friendship, brotherliness, or camaraderie.⁵ Neither is he appealing only for some common aim or a series of common aims as against something that is a common enemy. These negatives are important because so much of the modern talk about unity is entirely in such terms. It is all very vague and nebulous.⁶ Frequently the call to unity is stated in terms of the fact that the world of today is sadly divided. As on the one hand there are atheistic powers—Communism and humanism⁷—so on the other hand, we are told, it is the business of all who in any way believe in God to come together and to act together. We must not be too particular regarding what we believe, but we must have the spirit of fellowship, of friendship, and of working together against the common enemy.

Clearly, we must examine this attitude and must keep this modern

⁴ **ecumenicity** – promotion of unity between different Christian denominations.

⁵ **camaraderie** – mutual trust and friendship among people who spend much time together.

⁶ **vague and nebulous** – not clearly expressed and unclear.

⁷ **(secular) humanism** – belief that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without belief in God.

idea of unity in our minds as we follow the apostle's teaching in this chapter. We must stress at once one thing that is of the utmost importance. Whatever be the unity of which the apostle speaks, it is a unity that results directly from all he has been saying in the first three chapters of the epistle. You must not start in chapter 4 of the epistle to the Ephesians. To do so is to violate the context and to ignore the word *therefore*. In other words, you cannot have Christian unity unless it is based upon the great doctrines outlined in chapters 1 to 3. "Therefore..."! So, if anyone comes to you and says, "It does not much matter what you believe; if we call ourselves Christians, or if we believe in God in any sense, come, let us all work together," you should say in reply, "But, my dear sir, what about chapters 1 to 3 of the Epistle to the Ephesians? I know of no unity except that which is the outcome of, and the offspring of, all the great doctrines that the apostle lays down in those chapters." Whatever this unity may be, we are compelled to say that it must be *theological*, it must be *doctrinal*, it must be based upon *an understanding of the truth*.

Let us next observe that the word *Spirit* has a capital "S"— "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit." This refers to the Holy Spirit. Paul is not writing about the manifestation of some human spirit of friendship, he is not thinking in terms of the so-called public-school spirit, or the cricket team spirit, or that of the football team. It is a capital "S," it is the Holy Spirit. In verse 4, he repeats the same emphasis: "There is one body, and one Spirit"—the Holy Spirit. Everywhere in this context the word *Spirit* must be interpreted as referring to the Holy Spirit Himself. It is because this fact is so constantly forgotten that most of the modern talk about unity seems to me to be entirely unscriptural. It is entirely human. It is something that belongs to man. It is not the unity that the Spirit Himself produces. Let us proceed to look at this in the form of a number of statements.

The unity about which the apostle is concerned here is produced and created by the Holy Spirit Himself. He alone can produce this unity; and it is He alone Who does produce this unity. This is obviously a matter of fundamental importance. The Apostle makes it quite clear that this is a unity that you and I can never produce. He does not even ask us to do so, he does not call upon us to do so, he does not exhort us to do so. What he asks us to do is to be careful not to break the unity that is already there, and which has been produced and created by the Holy Spirit Himself. We are to maintain it, not create it. It is the unity of the Spirit. It is His work. It is something that He does in us.

Because that is true, the following deductions are also true. The

unity about which the apostle is concerned is a living and a vital unity. It is not a mechanical unity. There is all the difference in the world between a coalition or amalgamation⁸ and a true unity. Amalgamations and coalitions consist of a number of [different] units coming together for a given purpose; but the unity of the Spirit starts within and works outwardly. It is comparable to the unity found in a flower, or a tree, or in animal bodies. It is something essentially organic and vital, not something artificially produced. It is something that is inevitable because of its very nature. It is not external, but an *internal* unity.

Furthermore, this unity can only be understood as the work of the Holy Spirit is understood. If we lack a right understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, we cannot understand this unity. If we call the Holy Spirit “it,” or regard Him as merely a power and do not realize that He is the Third Person in the blessed Holy Trinity, we cannot understand this unity, and it will be non-existent. Nor can this unity ever be felt and experienced or put into practice unless the Holy Spirit is in us and has done His gracious work within us. This explains why it is sometimes so difficult to discuss this subject with certain people. They do not agree about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. They do not agree about regeneration and rebirth. Their idea of Christianity is that it simply means doing good and being moral and religious, or taking an interest in a particular denomination and its activities. No profitable conversation or discussion is possible with such people as their whole conception of the Spirit is different. No unity is possible between such people and those who take the scriptural view of the work of the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is not in us, we cannot experience this unity; it can only be experienced by those in whom He dwells and whom He has enlightened. But if the Holy Spirit is in that other person and in me, at once we are conscious of a bond of unity because the same Spirit is in us both, and we recognize it in one another. These surely are quite basic and fundamental considerations.

A vivid illustration of the unity brought about by the Holy Spirit has already been given in the second chapter. These Ephesian Gentiles who once were “far off,” “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph 2:12-13), have now been brought into God’s covenant with the Jews. He has acted in them, He has acted in the Jew, and so they are one. Therefore, to talk glibly⁹ and lightly about forgetting our differences and getting together and finding a common basis or a common denominator

⁸ **coalition or amalgamation** – alliance; joining together.

⁹ **glibly** – thoughtlessly with pat answers or insincere talk.

is to talk about something entirely different from what Paul teaches here. The setting aside of differences may be accomplished in politics or in industry or in many other realms. But when you start with the Holy Spirit and His person and His activity, you cannot speak in that manner. If He is not in me, I can have no spiritual fellowship with a man in whom He dwells. If He is not in him, but in me, there is no fellowship. If He is in both of us there is true fellowship; and this is the only basis of fellowship. It is where He reigns, and where the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is experienced, that this unity exists. Hence the benediction¹⁰ at the end of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2Co 13:14). Where the Spirit reigns there is unity...

The unity produced by the Spirit is primarily spiritual, unseen, and internal. Of course, it expresses itself also visibly and externally; for as Christians, we worship together, we belong to churches together, and come into contact with one another constantly. But the thing itself is internal. Let us note again the importance of the order. We do not start with that which is external and then hope to arrive at the internal. We start with the internal and then proceed to express it externally. We must bear this in mind constantly as we read modern books about ecumenicity or listen to sermons and appeals. Their great argument and appeal is that as hitherto divided and separate people, we must begin to act together, to work together, to pray together, and then we shall begin to feel the spirit of unity. But that is a *denial* of the apostle’s teaching. In every manifestation of life, the internal principle comes first, and then the outward manifestation. It was so in creation; it is the same in reproduction. Two very small cells contain the life out of which a complete body will develop. A body does not consist of a collection of parts and portions loosely and haphazardly joined together. Every individual part or member develops out of the central life. And it is precisely the same in this great and vital matter of spiritual unity.

From *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 34-35; www.bakerbookhouse.com.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author; born in Cardiff, Wales, UK.



Union with Christ is fundamental to all union among the saints.—*John Flavel*

¹⁰ **benediction** – pronouncement of a blessing, often at the end of a church service.

CHRIST PRAYED FOR UNITY

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664)

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me.—John 17:21

IN this verse is laid down the matter of Christ's petition: what it is that He prays for in the behalf of those who shall believe in Him. That is unity and concord¹ amongst themselves. As before, He prayed for the apostles that they "might be one" as apostles in the work of the ministry, so here He prays for all believers, so great a matter it is to have all the godly at union amongst themselves. Now although this union comprehends in it grace begun here and glory consummated hereafter, yet it is again and again to be considered that these glorious privileges should be comprehended in their union, as if that being preserved all was preserved, and without that there could not be any godliness here or blessedness hereafter.

We have then the unity and agreement of all believers made the principal part of Christ's petition for them, and in that, take notice:

1. **Of the *benefit* itself:** "So that they may be one." He does not say that they may love and agree with one another, but "be one," as if the church should be but one person, and as the apostle argues, "no man ever yet hated his own flesh" (Eph 5:29). So, there should be no divisions, envyings, or differences amongst the godly because they are one spirit, as it were. They should no more hate one another than a man does himself. Here is,

2. **The *universal extent* of this unity:** "That they all"—though there be great variety and difference in gifts, graces, offices, [and] outward condition, yet they must all be one.

3. **The *pattern* of this unity:** "as thou Father in me, and I in thee."

4. **The *nature* and *quality* of this unity:** "that they may be one in us."

5. **The *benefit* and *fruit* of this union:** "that the world may believe thou hast sent me"...

DOCTRINE: Union amongst the godly is of so great necessity and consequence that Christ does in their behalf principally and chiefly pray for this. Though in this unity be included grace and sanctification, yet that which is expressly mentioned is their agreement...I shall pursue

¹ **concord** – agreement.

from this text union amongst believers themselves.

Consider that there is a two-fold unity among the godly. And because our Savior does enlarge Himself about it, I shall also insist upon it. To open this truth, consider that there is a two-fold unity or union among the godly: *invisible* and *visible*.

1. Invisible Union: Invisible unity is that whereby they, being united to Christ their Head by the Spirit on God's part and faith on [their] part, do receive spiritual life and increase, in which some believers are compared to the several² members of the body and Christ to the head because of that spiritual life and motion they receive from Him. This is the foundation of our visible union; and without this, though we may be outwardly of the church, yet we do indeed receive no saving advantage by Christ. Of this union the text does not speak because it is such a union that the world seeing it may thereby be induced to believe.

2. Visible Union: There is therefore a visible union, whereby believers do outwardly and visibly express their compacted nearness to one another. And so those particular churches of Corinth and Ephesus are called Christ's body in respect of their external union as well as internal, for not only by faith but also by the ordinances we have fellowship with Christ and with one another.

The text speaks of this visible unity, and it is made a special means to bring the world to believe. Whereas on the contrary, differences of opinion, sad rents,³ and sects⁴ in religion are the only way to confirm men in their impiety,⁵ and to think there is no truth and no religion at all. This visible union does diffuse itself in many branches, as:

a. *There is a unity of faith and profession:* When they all believe and speak the same thing. This must be laid as the foundation of unity, for unity in error and idolatry, or false ways, is not peace, but a faction or conspiracy. This unity of faith is reckoned among the many unities the apostle mentions in Ephesians 4:5 and Philippians 2:2. They are exhorted to be "of one mind"; and the apostle notably presses this: "that ye all speak the same thing...be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1Co 1:10). What a sad breach, then, has the devil made upon God's people when there are so few of the same mind and do judge the same things. But (as you heard) it must be a sameness and unity in the true faith. For the Jews are one amongst

² **several** – different.

³ **rents** – tears; schisms.

⁴ **sects** – groups with differing opinions or beliefs from a larger group to which they belong.

⁵ **impiety** – ungodliness.

themselves; the Mohammedans⁶ are one; the Papists are so one that they boast of it and make it a note of the true church. Now though this should be granted (though they have a thousand divisions amongst themselves), yet unless it is unity in the faith, unity in sound doctrine, it is nothing at all.

b. *There is a unity of affection and love [both] in the heart and outwardly one to another.* Love is called the affection of union and makes a man to be the object he loves as much as his own. And we see the prayer of Christ abundantly fulfilled in this respect concerning the primitive⁷ Christians, for it is said [that they] “were of one heart and of one soul” (Act 4:32). Those thousands of believers were as if they had but one heart and soul among them. And thus in Tertullian’s time, the heathens did admire the love Christians had to one another. Our Savior makes it a surer sign of discipleship than if they wrought miracles (Joh 3:35).

c. *This union is seen in the public worship and ordinances that God has appointed.* As God said of man at first [that] it was not good [that] he should be alone, so it is true of every believer. He is not to serve God alone, to think that a private religion is enough. Therefore, you have the examples of the primitive Christians, how they “were all with one accord in one place” and that to have the enjoyment of public ordinances, they prayed together, the Word was preached to them, they received the sacraments together (Act 2:1; 5:12). And the apostle in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 shows how the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper declared their union and communion one with another. Hence the apostle reproves those whose manner it was to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb 10:25).

This visible union of believers in church ordinances is their highest beauty and their chiefest advantage. Hence, David professes his ravishment⁸ herein, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!” (Psa 84:2); and...it is called “the beauties of holiness” (Psa 110:3). And in Haggai 2, this temple is said to be more glorious than the former ever was; and that because of Christ’s presence therein, preaching and reforming all abuses and corruptions. When the ark was taken, Phinehas’s [wife] cried, “The glory is departed from Israel” (1Sa 4:21). Hence the ordinances even in this life are called the kingdom of heaven because of God’s glorious presence therein. David, when banished, longed to see “thy glory...as I have seen thee in the sanctuary” (Psa 63:2).

⁶ Mohammedans – Muslims.

⁷ primitive – first; earliest.

⁸ ravishment – delight; ecstasy.

And then it is our greatest profit and advantage, for God's presence is promised to these, so that the Christian ordinances are the life of the church. There is a larger dispensation⁹ of God's gifts and graces here than otherwise.

d. *This unity is seen in that public order and government that Christ has appointed in His church.* As God has appointed some to be shepherds and to govern, so others to hear and obey, He has commanded admonition, and in some cases sharp reproof, and where obstinacy is, to cast out. Now it is very hard to have unity in this respect, for, as in 1 Corinthians 12, it appears private Christians do [with] difficulty keep within their sphere. Every member would be an eye, as the apostle there charges. So, it is hard to meet with an obedient ear, though to a wise and godly reproof. It is therefore a blessed thing, as to have unity of faith, so also of order. That is to see every member of the church with its relation in a harmonious way, as it is in the body, though they be heterogenic¹⁰ parts, yet they all harmoniously unite in their operations. This unity of order is like the nerves and ligaments to this spiritual society.

e. *This unity is seen in the sympathizing that all believers have one with another.* And that in respect of mourning and rejoicing. In respect of those that mourn, we are to weep and mourn with them. We are to bear one another's burdens. We are to be affected by the church's calamities as being also of the body. As the apostle said, "That which cometh upon me daily, the care of all churches...Who is offended, and I burn not?" (2Co 11:28-29). The same proportionally is to be in every believer. Therefore, this unity of believers should be vigorous [in] this way: what evils, what exercises befall others, they should be affected with them as their own. This discovers¹¹ they are lively members of the body. For if Christ, though in heaven, was sensible¹² of the persecutions done by Paul against the church, saying, "Why persecutest thou me?" (Act 26:14), how much rather should every member account the temptations of others as his own?

As it is thus for mourning, so also for rejoicing. There ought to be such a unity among believers that we are to rejoice in the gifts, graces, and good things that others have, as if they were our own. But oh, the self-love, the envy, the repinings¹³ that are apt to be in one godly man against another. "The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy" (Jam

⁹ **dispensation** – distribution.

¹⁰ **heterogenic** – diverse.

¹¹ **discovers** – shows; reveals.

¹² **sensible** – aware.

¹³ **repinings** – complaints.

4:5), says the apostle—even in believers. Hence are those daily exhortations against grudgings, murmurings, and envyings one against another, and these are made the fruit of the flesh because where the Spirit of God works and enlivens, there is joy, peace, and longsuffering, all graces contrary to such unquiet distempers.¹⁴ Now this is very difficult to flesh and blood, that those parts and gifts which obscure yours and those good things in others that seem to hinder yours, yet to rejoice and bless God for them, as if it were [in] your own self, but this spiritual and mystical¹⁵ unity will enable you thereunto. Neither is the sun nor air more requisite than this union; no wonder if our Savior does thus affectionately pray for it.

f. This union is seen in their mutual striving together in promoting the kingdom and glory of Christ. They all have the same heart, the same shoulders, the same tongue to bless and praise God. They are like so many servants in the same house, all promoting and furthering their master's work. As the apostle says, all the officers are one; "he that planteth and he that watereth are one" because they agree in one end, which is to set forward the work of God (1Co 3:8). Thus it is here, though there be never so much variety in the gifts and graces, and conditions of God's people, yet they are all one in this work. The glory of God is the end they all look upon. Thus, you see in how many particulars this unity diffuses itself.

3. Invisible union does extend itself further than the visible. For this is to the visible church only, but that to the invisible...In this respect there is a unity between all believers that ever have been, with Enoch, Abel, Abraham, and all that of old ever were. This is believed in that which usually is called the Apostle's Creed:¹⁶ "I believe in the...catholic church." Sometimes there was added "the one catholic church," and this is believed, and not seen; but by this it is that all the godly who have been, are, and ever shall be, make up one body. All Christ's sheep will have one sheepfold, so that there is an invisible union, where there cannot be a visible one.

4. Some are of this union both visibly and invisibly, externally and internally, and in appearance. Now such only who in both ways of this

¹⁴ **unquiet distempers** – uneasy or agitated feelings; disturbances of mind.

¹⁵ **mystical** – having a spiritual character that transcends human understanding.

¹⁶ **Apostles' Creed** – The Apostles' Creed owes its name to the fact that it summarizes the essential content of the apostolic faith; hence it has been rightly called "the apostolic confession of faith." It sets forth the apostles' core New Testament teachings, as has been well-said, "in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity." The assumption that the twelve apostles were joint authors of this creed has no historical foundation. (*Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible*, p. 1965)

unity enjoy God are indeed members of Christ and receive benefit by Him. But the others are only in name and title, like a withered branch in a tree, or an artificial eye or leg, which, though joined to the body, yet receives no life or nourishment thereof. Think it not therefore enough to be of this unity; many have gloried and rested on this, that they are of such and such a church, yet their condemnation is greater than those of Sodom and Gomorrah.

5. This unity, therefore, when it is true and advantageous, does first terminate on Christ, and then descends to others. Hence it is added, “that they may be one in us.” There must be first a unity with Christ the Head, and then it extends to other members... This is to be looked upon as the foundation and cause of all. There must be first an incorporating into Christ. “He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1Co 6:17).

6. This visible union is not interrupted in some effects of it by distance of place. For in regard to prayer, there everyone is remembered when the church is prayed for. The poor Christian who cannot pray for himself yet has the prayers of the whole church of God. What a comfortable refreshing this should be to every godly soul!

USE OF EXHORTATION: To lay to heart more the divisions, differences, and breaches that are among the godly. Learn of Christ here *to be affected with the unity of the church*. Again and again, He commended peace to them. We are commanded to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. God is the God of peace, the gospel is the gospel of peace, believers are called the children of peace. Take heed of being a Jonah in this ship; let not your pride, your conceits, your discontents make you tear and rend the church. [May] Jerusalem be “as a city that is compact together” (Psa 122:3)!

From *Christ's Prayer before His Passion*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 316-322; used by permission; heritagebooks.org.

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664): Nonconformist English minister; a prolific preacher and writer; born in Watford, Hertfordshire, England, UK.



How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, “When you have settled your own internal differences, we will believe!” All this, we need not doubt, the Lord Jesus foresaw with prophetic eye. It was the foresight of it which made Him pray so earnestly that believers might be “one.”

—J. C. Ryle

GUARDING THE SPIRIT'S UNITY

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit
in the bond of peace.—Ephesians 4:3*

HAVING thus considered the nature, the character of the unity, let us now look at our duty with respect to it. The particular words that the apostle uses explain it perfectly. **The first word is “endeavor.”** We tend to think of this word “endeavor” as “making an attempt at”; but that is not the root meaning of the word. It really means “to be diligent” and derives from a word which suggests speed.¹ We are to hurry to do something, to show great concern about, expressing solicitude²—an “endeavouring to keep.” Above everything else, says the apostle, as Christians in this calling to which you have been called, hasten to do this, be diligent with respect to it, never forget it, let this be the chief thing in your life. Above all else show great concern and solicitude with respect to this unity that exists among you.

The next word is “to keep”—“endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit.” “To keep” means “to guard,” “to hold fast,” “to preserve.” The apostle does not ask us to make a unity or to create a unity. It exists because we are Christians, he says, and we are to guard it. We cannot be Christians without the work of the Holy Spirit; we cannot be Christians unless the Spirit resides in us. And He is in all true Christians. The unity is there, and what we must do is to guard it, to keep it, to preserve it. Our first and chief concern as Christians should be to guard and to preserve this precious, wondrous unity of the Spirit. God’s grand design, the thing that God is doing through the church, and by means of which, we have been told in chapter 3 verse 10, even the principalities and powers in the heavenly places are going to be astonished and amazed when they see it, is to produce and maintain this unity between the redeemed, whether Jew or Gentile. If we believe in God, we must ever feel that our first duty is to guard this unity, to preserve it at all costs, to strain every nerve and be diligent in endeavoring to keep it and manifest it.

¹ **EDITOR’S NOTE:** According to Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), *endeavor* emphasizes “to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, be zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort.”

² **solicitude** – care.

The manner in which we are to do so is stated by the apostle in plain words. They can be grouped together thus. The first two words describe us and our own internal disposition. The following words describe our relationship to others. The first expression is “with all lowliness.”

Lowliness is humility, and especially humility of mind. This particular emphasis is found in all the lexicons.³ It means modesty. It is the opposite of self-esteem, self-assertion, and pride. Humility is one of the chief of all the Christian virtues. It is the hallmark of the child of God. Humility means having a poor opinion of yourself and of your powers and faculties. To use the word of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, it means to be *poor in spirit*. It is the opposite of what is found in the so-called man of the world. It is the opposite of the worldly spirit that urges man to trust in himself and to believe in himself. It is the opposite of all aggressiveness, self-advertisement, ambition, and all the brazenness⁴ of life at this present time. There is nothing sadder about this present age than the appalling absence of humility; and when this same lack is found in the church of God, it is the greatest tragedy of all. As Chrysostom⁵ said long ago, “Nothing will so avail to divide the church as love of power.”

Next to lowliness, the apostle places meekness, which invariably accompanies it. Meekness means an inner mildness and gentleness. Yet it is compatible with great strength. Moses was the meekest of all men, and yet he was a strong man. In his inner being he was a very mild man, a gentle man. And our Lord Himself was meek. Meekness really means readiness to suffer wrong, if need be, the committing of everything to God. The apostle Paul himself was a very meek man. At the same time, he could say some very strong things. He could be firm and powerful; there is something magisterial⁶ about his statements. Yet as we read his epistles, we find this element of humility and of meekness everywhere. He has already manifested this meekness in the third chapter where he writes, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints”—though he was the greatest of all—“is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). Humility and meekness are the first essentials in guarding “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

These are the virtues found in our Lord Himself. He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

³ **lexicons** – dictionaries of Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic words.

⁴ **brazenness** – bold, shameless defiance.

⁵ **John Chrysostom** (c. 347-407) – early Greek theologian and expositor.

⁶ **magisterial** – authoritative.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Mat 11:28-29). Matthew, in the twelfth chapter of his Gospel, quoting from Isaiah, describes our Lord thus: "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (vv. 19-20). Such was His character as we find it portrayed in the gospel portraits of our blessed Lord. And we belong to Him and are members of His body. So, the apostle in writing to the Corinthians makes use of this argument: "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2Co 10:1). Writing in his second Epistle to Timothy and giving him advice, Paul says, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2:23-25). That is how you are to behave, says the apostle to Timothy in effect. There will be people who will not agree with you; do not be annoyed by them and become angry. You must not strive with them; but rather try to get them to see the truth. Put it before them in a way that will appeal to them. Try to win them to it, wean them from error, and win them to the truth.

The apostle Peter gives a similar exhortation in a very striking manner. In his first Epistle, he says, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1Pe 5:5). Note the interesting expression, "Be clothed with humility." The word that is translated "clothed" means "putting on the apron of" humility. Surely when Peter wrote these words, he had in his mind the scene of which we read in the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel. We are shown the very Son of God here on earth; and this is what we are told about Him: He knew whence he had come and whither He was going. He knew that He had come from God and that He was going to God. But He took a towel, and He put it on Himself as an apron, and He stooped down and washed the feet of His disciples. Then He said to them, If I Who am your Lord and Master do that to you, do the same to one another. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet...wash one another's feet" (Joh 13:14). "Be clothed with humility" (1Pe 5:5). "Put on humility as an apron." Gird yourself with the towel of humility; stoop right down and wash the feet of others. This is the secret of preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

But Paul adds the word *all*—“with *all* humility and meekness.” Why does he add the word *all*? It means “with every possible” humility and meekness, “with every kind of,” “in all situations,” “at all times.” We are not to put on this apron on Sundays only, and then forget it during the remainder of the week. Always keep it on, always be clothed with humility, wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whoever the person is, whatever the time—“all humility and meekness.” Never be without it.

This is to be our fundamental disposition and character. Are we humble? “Let no man think of himself above that which he ought to think,” says the apostle. “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1Co 10:12). It is our wrong conceits of ourselves that cause division. One is proud of his birth, another of his family. One is proud of his money, another of his nationality, his status, his business acumen.⁷ Another is proud of his brains, his understanding—perhaps of doctrine—and he is so proud of it that he is causing division and thereby denying his doctrine! Humility! Humbleness of mind! Oliver Cromwell⁸ said to certain Scottish presbyters, “I beseech you, in the bowels⁹ of Christ, consider it possible you may be mistaken.” That is humility. And meekness goes with it; and we are to show it everywhere.

That being our fundamental disposition, we are to manifest it in our dealings with others. *Longsuffering*, which simply means suffering long. It means holding yourself in control for a long time and not giving way to passion. You may be confronting a person who is irritating by his conduct—by what he says or by what he does. Well, says the apostle, just hold out, do not give way to that desire to demolish him or to smash him or to humiliate him. Hold on, be *longsuffering*, do not give way to passion. In the Bible, longsuffering is attributed to God Himself. If God were not longsuffering, not one of us would be still alive, not one of us would be a Christian. If God were not longsuffering there would be no Christianity at all. Longsuffering is His attitude to us: so, let it be our attitude towards one another. We must suffer ourselves, and others must suffer us. Let all suffer long!

Then we come to *forbearing*. All these words are related. To “forbear” means “to hold yourself up against.” A person tempts you to engage in a wrong attitude or action. Hold yourself up against [that] temptation.

⁷ **acumen** – ability to make good judgments and quick decisions.

⁸ **Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658)** – English general and statesman, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth (1653-1658); led the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War.

⁹ **bowels** – considered the location of tender affections in human nature, such as kindness, benevolence, mercy, and love; somewhat equivalent to the way “heart” is used today.

Put up with it; bear it; endure it; suffer it. All these things are difficult, are they not? Yes, but we are called to such a glorious life that it is of necessity difficult. Thank God it is! Others may not understand things as we do, or they may not be doing things in the way that we would like them to be done. Do not retaliate at once. As one who is concerned about the preservation of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, bear with them and try to understand them. A person may be irritable because he has been having a very trying time, or he may not be well physically. Perhaps he has not had advantages and opportunities in life, perhaps his brain power is not what it ought to be, perhaps he has not had your opportunity of hearing these truths expounded. Make every excuse you can for this other person, whether it applies to his conduct or his doctrine or anything else. Try above everything else to win him to your position if you are convinced that you are right. Do not merely try to score over him, do not strike him, do not dismiss him, do not be contemptuous¹⁰ of him, do not be impatient with him. We must be patient with one another, we must be forbearing, we must be longsuffering.

But notice the apostle's further addition! "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another *in love*." If you love people, you will be longsuffering and forbearing toward them because you will have their interests at heart. You will not be so much concerned about showing that you are right, and they are wrong. You will be anxious that they should be right as well as yourself. You love them and are interested in them and concerned about them; and because of that you are patient with them. If you love a child, you will be patient with him. He may ask you the same question a thousand times, but you will still go on answering patiently. You do something, and the child says, "Do it again," and you do it again, and again; and you go on until you are almost exhausted. You even enjoy doing so, though you are almost collapsing physically. It is because you love the little child. He does not know; he does not understand; and it would be very wrong to expect him to understand at that age. You must come down to his level, put on the apron, get on your knees, be one with him. And if you love him, you do so readily and gladly.

What the apostle is really saying is that, as we manifest these characteristics, we are preserving the unity. This is so because we are peaceable, we are peace-loving, and we are people who are easy to live with. We are peacemakers (Mat 5:9). This unity of the Spirit is kept together,

¹⁰ **contemptuous** – showing open disrespect or dislike.

is bound, or banded together, by peace, by the bond [or the band] which is peace. And as we are peaceable, peace-loving, and peace-making, we preserve peace, and we preserve the unity.

In all this, the Apostle Paul has been repeating the Beatitudes that our Lord Jesus Christ uttered at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. This is what He said concerning the people He had come into the world to produce: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” “blessed are they that mourn,” “blessed are the meek,” “blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness,” “blessed are the peacemakers.” These are the characteristics of the Christian. This is the calling to which we have been called. If we fail here, success anywhere else is useless. If my way of asserting that which is right means that I break the peace, I am not right, I have failed to keep the balance of truth, or there is something lacking in my character. The end of all doctrine is to preserve this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The end of all conduct is to be the same. This is the teaching of the Beatitudes and of 1 Corinthians 13. Indeed, it is “the fruit of the Spirit,” which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal 5:22-23). Indeed, the apostle is really saying, “Do not quench the Spirit, do not grieve the Spirit, but allow the Spirit to produce His own glorious fruit in you and amongst you.” And as you do so, the unity of the Spirit Himself will be preserved among you by the wonderful bond and band of peace.

From *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16*
(Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 34-35.



One great reason why communions do so little good is that [persons who take the Lord's Supper] are so little concerned in one another for their spiritual welfare. And this hath its rise from their not discerning and seriously laying to heart the spiritual relation there is among them, [which they have established] and publicly testified by their partaking of one bread at the communion table. People readily have some notion that it is a communion with *Christ*, but few consider that it is a communion of *saints* and what duties flow from it as such—*Thomas Boston*

In Acts 4:32, we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of *one* heart and of *one* soul.” And is it not still true that among the *real* people of God, despite all their minor differences, there is a real, a fundamental, and a blessed underlying unity—they *all* believe God's Word is inspired, inerrant, of final authority; they *all* believe in the glorious person and rest upon the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ; they *all* aim at the glory of God; they *all* pant for the time when they shall be forever with the Lord. “*One as we*” shows that the union prayed for is a divine, spiritual, intimate, invisible, unbreakable one!

—*Arthur W. Pink*

RULES FOR PROMOTING HARMONY AMONG CHURCH MEMBERS¹

Thomas Smyth (1808-1873)

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.—John 13:34

- 1** To remember that we are all subject to failings and infirmities² of one kind or another (Mat 7:1-5; Rom 2:21-23).
2. To bear with and not magnify each other's infirmities (Gal 6:1).
3. To pray one for another in our social meetings, and particularly in private (Jam 5:16).
4. To avoid going from house to house for the purpose of hearing news and interfering with other people's business (Lev 19:16).
5. Always to turn a deaf ear to any slanderous³ report and to allow no charge to be brought against any person until well-founded and proved (Pro 25:23).
6. If a member be in fault, to tell him of it in private before it is mentioned to others (Mat 18:15).
7. To watch against shyness⁴ of each other and put the best construction on any action that has the appearance of opposition or resentment (Pro 10:12).
8. To observe the just rule of Solomon, that is, to leave off contention before it is meddled with (Pro 17:14).
9. If a member has offended, to consider how glorious, how God-like it is to forgive, and how unlike a Christian it is to revenge (Eph 4:2).
10. To remember that it is always a grand artifice⁵ of the devil to promote distance and animosity⁶ among members of churches, and we should, therefore, watch against everything that furthers his end (Jam 3:16).

¹ **EDITOR'S NOTE** – Pastor Smyth appears to have taken these twelve rules from William S. Plumer's *Manual for Church Members* (Petersburg, VA: Yancey & Wilson, Bank St., 1833).

² **infirmities** – weaknesses of moral character; the inability to resist natural inclinations.

³ **slanderous** – harmful to a person's reputation and often untrue.

⁴ **shyness** – viewing others with distrust or suspicion.

⁵ **artifice** – deceptive means of getting something; trick.

⁶ **animosity** – hostility.

11. To consider how much more good we can do in the world at large and in the church in particular when we are all united in love, than we could do when acting alone and indulging a contrary spirit (Joh 13:35).

12. Lastly, to consider the express injunction⁷ of Scripture and the beautiful example of Christ as to these important things (Eph 4:32; 1Pe 2:21; Joh 13:5, 35).

From *Manual, for the Use of the Members of the Second Presbyterian Church, Charleston, S.C.* (Charleston, S.C.: Jenkins & Hussey, 1838); in the public domain.

Thomas Smyth (1808-1873): Presbyterian pastor and author; born in Belfast, Ireland, UK, died in Charleston, South Carolina, USA.



Unity and peace are a duty well-pleasing to God, Who is styled the author of peace and not of confusion in all the churches. God's Spirit rejoiceth in the unity of our spirits; but, on the other hand, where strife and divisions are, there the Spirit of God is grieved. Hence it is that the apostle no sooner calls upon the Ephesians not to grieve the Spirit of God, but he presently [adds] a remedy against that evil: that they put away bitterness and evil speaking, "and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32).

As unity and peace are pleasing to God and rejoiceth His Spirit, so it rejoiceth the hearts and spirits of God's people—unity and peace brings heaven down upon earth among us. Hence it is that the apostle tells us that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom 14:17). Where unity and peace are, there is heaven upon earth; by this we taste the first-fruits of that blessed estate we shall one day live in the fruition of, when we shall come "to the general assembly and church of the first-born," whose names are written in heaven, "and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb 12:23).

The unity and peace of the church make communion of saints desirable. What is it that embitters church-communion and makes it burdensome, but divisions? Have you not heard many complain that they are weary of church-communion because of church contention? But now, where unity and peace are, there Christians long for communion.—*John Bunyan*

Our union is from God, in God, and to God: from the Spirit, with God, through Christ. The whole Trinity is concerned in this union. By the communion of the Spirit, we are mystically united to Christ, and by Christ to God. The Father is, as it were, the root, Christ the trunk, the Spirit the sap, we the branches, and our works the fruits. This is the great mystery delivered in the Scriptures.

Christ doth not only dwell in us by faith, but God dwelleth in us,
and we in God, and the Spirit dwelleth in us.

—*Thomas Manton*

⁷ **injunction** – command.

THE UNITY OF MINISTERS

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664)

That they may be one, as we are.—John 17:11

THE apostles may be considered strictly and particularly as men in office, as those who were appointed to preach the gospel; so our Savior prays for their unity in this consideration.

It is of infinite consequence that the ministers of the gospel should agree among themselves; for when they are divided, the people must be divided...Our Savior, knowing the devices of Satan to set apostle against apostle, pastor against pastor, therefore prays for their unity in this ministerial office...He says not that they “may be united,” but [that they] “may be one,” and that according to the highest example of all unity, the Father and the Son...The apostle, arguing against church divisions, by setting up several officers one against another, says, “he that planteth and he that watereth are one” (1Co 3:8).

DOCTRINE: It is a special mercy for ministers of the gospel to agree in one. They all have the same [goal], and all have one general employment, namely, the conversion of men to God...Nothing is so terrible¹ to the churches’ adversaries as their pastors’ unity. This was the reason, say some, [that] our Savior chose apostles that, for the most part, were of kindred one to another, so that their love might be the more inviolably² preserved. Our Savior also gave this counsel [to] the disciples: “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another” (Mar 9:50). “Have salt,” i.e., season the world and one another with grace, but lest this salt should bite and smart too much, He adds, “and have peace with one another.” Thus, peace and love are of [such a] great concernment that He leaves only peace with them as a legacy: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (Joh 14:27), and He calls this the “new commandment.” He lays upon them to love one another (Joh 13:37); indeed, He makes this a character of their discipleship, not if they cast out devils or work miracles, but *if they love one another*. To open this doctrine, consider:

1. That such is the corruption of the best men, and Satan is ready to blow up the sparks immediately. That there have been contentions and

¹ terrible – terrifying.

² inviolably – without violation or destruction.

differences amongst the most eminent pillars in the church. Twice we read of the disciples' contentions amongst themselves concerning primacy and preferment above one another. Afterwards, the Scripture tells us of a paroxysm,³ a sharp controversy between Paul and Barnabas (Act 15:36-41), yet Paul and Peter have a hot contest, and that in a religious point of practice (Gal 2:11-16)...The Christian church is divided and subdivided against itself, and that which if done in private causes would be called malice and revenge, in religious affairs, [it] is called zeal and courage for God's glory. At that famous first Council of Nicaea,⁴ when Constantine called the bishops together to end religious controversies, instead of this, they had prepared mutual libels⁵ and accusations one against another, which, Constantine perceiving, took the papers, rent them in pieces, and burnt them before their faces, gravely exhorting to peace and unanimity!...And who can with heart tender enough speak of the many oppositions and divisions between Calvinists and Lutherans, and others of the Reformed church, by all which we see the necessity of Christ's prayer for unity, there being such corruptions in our hearts, and Satan so busy to make differences and dissensions, that though legions of devils can agree to be in one man, yet he will not suffer two doctors to agree in one church.

2. The unity that the officers of God's church ought to have consists in these things:

a. *Unity of faith, that they believe the same doctrine, called therefore "one faith" (Eph 4:5).* And there is no other foundation but one, even the Lord Christ (1Co 3:11); and indeed, this must be the ground of all other unity, when the papists would make unity a note of the true church. We say unity without true doctrine is but a faction...The Turks⁶ have unity, the Jews have unity, but because they have not the true doctrine, it is not true peace and concord; so that true doctrine is the soul, the fountain, and the root of all.

b. *A second unity is in the same confession and acknowledgement of faith.* And that in the same words, and truly this is very desirable not only to hold the same doctrinal points, but the same words also, for new words bring in new doctrines; hence the apostle, pressing for unity, does not only exhort them to be of "the same mind and the same judgment," but to "speak the same thing" (1Co 1:10). Timothy is exhorted to "hold fast

³ **paroxysm** – sudden outburst of emotion.

⁴ (First) **Council of Nicaea (AD 325)** – first ecumenical council; main purpose was to answer the heresy of Arianism, which taught that Christ was a created being, not incarnate deity.

⁵ **libels** – defamations; charges.

⁶ **Turks** – Muslims.

the form of sound words” (2Ti 1:13). Though they be but words and a form, yet he must hold them fast...It is a remarkable expression [that] God is said to speak “by the mouth of his holy prophets” (Luk 1:70). Though they were many, yet it is “mouth,” not “mouths.” They had all but one mouth and spoke the same thing. Thus it ought to be but one mouth of all the ministers of the gospel to believe. We are to know what all teach by what one teaches.

c. *There must be unity of affection and hearts.* As in the beginning of the church’s increase their unity of affection is greatly commended (Act 1:14). They continued “with one heart.” So also [in] Acts 2:1, 46, [and] especially Acts 4:32: “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” Though a multitude, yet they had but one soul, one heart.

Thus, you see what kind of unity there ought to be among the ministers of the gospel.

3. In the next place, let us consider the grounds why it is such a mercy to have unity among church officers.

a. *Because fortitude and strength are in unity*...“If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand,” says our Savior (Mar 3:24). When one piece of the wall divides from the other, it foretells ruin...All the united power of the church is little enough against their common enemies, and shall they weaken themselves?

b. *As unity strengthens, it opposes the enemy more successfully, which is the devil and all his instruments.* What is there that the popish adversary does more insult with than to upbraid with the diverse sects that are among the Protestants? For although we can retort and tell them of their divisions, and that in fundamental points, yet it is our shame and grief that such a charge is in some measure true, though not in that height the adversaries do revile, for none of the Reformed differ in fundamentals...The Lutheran spirit judges the Calvinistic diabolical; and thus inconstant, inconsiderate persons look upon this as a great argument against the truth, whereas even in the apostles’ times, the church of God had sad divisions amongst themselves (1Co 3:1-23). Oh, then let us bewail the corruption of the best, that they should be so far transported with passion as to neglect the truths of God by giving advantage to the common adversary!

c. *Unity is of great consequence amongst the ministers of the gospel because their divisions breed divisions amongst the people.* The differences [between] teachers breed irreconcilable distractions amongst people. [It would be similar to this:] if the heavens should be confused in their motions, it

would distract and destroy sublunary⁷ things. We also see what divisions there were amongst the people in the church of Corinth, when the teachers were divided: some for Paul and some for Apollos (1Co 3:5-8).

d. *Pray to God for unity among church officers because their controversies bring a main neglect of the chief work of their ministry, which is to come out and to build up souls in heaven's way.* This is the [goal to which] God has called us. Now, when we fall out with one another and set up opinion against opinion, the work of the ministry is much retarded.⁸ Hence, the apostle enjoins Timothy to [flee] such disputations and quarrelings as are unprofitable, because they [wear] away godliness and are like thorns and nettles among the corn, hindering [its] growth.

e. *Unity is to be desired because this agrees with their office and call.* They preach the gospel of peace, and God is the God of peace. Christ is the Prince of peace, and He is our peace reconciling all things (Col 3:15). Why then should the minister's tongue be a tongue of war, as if they were priests to Bellona,⁹ rather than the ministers of the gospel? So that if all these grounds be considered, we may well pray with our Savior, "Lord make the ministers of the gospel as one man," for divisions (as Jerome said) are "losses of friends, gains of enemies," and "public inciters of divine wrath"...

Exhortation: To follow Christ in this prayer, give the great God of heaven no rest by prayer until He has given rest to His church and the guides thereof. Cry out as the disciples did to Christ, to rebuke the winds and tempests, for the ship we are in is sinking. These divisions are not only sins but sad prognostics¹⁰ of God's wrath, as if He had a purpose to unchurch us, and to make us no more His people, as He did to the churches in Asia.

From *Christ's Prayer before His Passion*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 521-527; used by permission; heritagebooks.org.



Let the recollection of this part of Christ's prayer (John 17) abide in our minds and exercise a constant influence on our behavior as Christians. Let no man think lightly, as some men seem to do, of schism, or count it a small thing to multiply sects, parties, and denominations. These very things, we may depend, only help the devil and damage the cause of Christ. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom 12:18).

—J. C. Ryle

⁷ **sublunary** – earthly.

⁸ **retarded** – held back from progress.

⁹ **Bellona** – Roman goddess of war, destruction, and conquest.

¹⁰ **prognostics** – predictions.

THE UNITY OF PASTORS & MEMBERS

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace.
—Romans 14:19

I am requested on the present occasion to give you a word of advice as respects your deportment to your pastor and to one another. All I shall attempt will be to explain and to enforce the exhortation contained in the text; and if peace be with you, prosperity will follow as a matter of course.

I. EXPLAIN THE EXHORTATION: In general, I may observe, we do not wish you to be so fond of peace as to sacrifice *truth* to preserve it. If your pastor deserts those grand essential truths that he has this day confessed, you ought to desert him, or rather to desire that he would leave you. Nor do we mean that you are to maintain peace at the expense of *righteousness*—a peace consisting in the neglect of discipline and the passing over of such evils as ought to be exposed and reproved. It is the glory of a man to pass over an injury done to himself, but not to be pliable in matters that relate to God's glory. It is lamentable, however, to reflect that in general, men are less severe against sin towards God than against an injury done to themselves. The rule of Scripture is this: "First pure, then peaceable" (Jam 3:17). Let this be your rule...

First, endeavor by all means to preserve a good understanding with your pastor. His peace of mind is essential for his happiness and your edification (Heb 13:17).

1. *Let your stated attendance on his ministry be constant and candid.* If you are negligent or late, it will affect his peace of mind. He will think his labors are unacceptable. And if you should discover any mistakes in his preaching, consider human frailty. Do not talk of them to others, nor among yourselves; but to him with modesty and tenderness.

2. *Let the vigilance you exercise over his conduct be characterized by the same tenderness and candor.* Enemies will watch him with a desire for his halting; but do not you. Be not hasty in taking up or falling in with reports to his disadvantage.

3. *Let your contributions for his support be distinguished, not only by their liberality, but also by the cheerfulness with which they are given.* Let it be a tribute of love...Do not imagine that your contributions entitle you to

scrutinize and dictate in his family arrangements. His being a minister does not destroy his privilege as a man. Ministers also have peculiar feelings in reference to such subjects. If one of you were to intermeddle with the domestic arrangements of another, you would be told to mind your own concerns and not to interfere with his, seeing he does not come to you for what he has. But your minister would feel a delicacy on this point and a difficulty, which it should be your study to render unnecessary. And, after all, you have no more right to inspect his concerns than he yours.

4. Let your exercise of discipline be prompt and such as shall preserve him from prejudice. Always unite with him, that *he* may not have to endure all the prejudice and odium¹ consequent on strict discipline. In many cases, you may relieve him altogether from the painful duty, and thus prevent his ministrations from being rejected. Take as much of this from him as you can, that the gospel of Christ be not hindered (1Co 9:2). These are some of the things, an attention to which would greatly contribute to his peace of mind and to your edification.

Secondly, let me exhort you to endeavor, by all means, to preserve peace among one another.

1. Be careful to cultivate a spirit of love. There is nothing more conducive to² peace than this. Provoke not one another to anger, but “to love and good works.” Be examples of love, striving who shall excel in acts of kindness and sympathy. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

2. Beware of sin. There is nothing more opposed to Christian peace than this. Where this is nourished, peace will be banished; for though it be private, it will work, and work mischief. It will be a wedge, gradually widening the breach between God and your souls and between one another.

3. Beware of a disputatious³ temper. Debates *may* be productive of good. But they too often originate in captiousness⁴ and pride. Think of the account of them in God’s Word. “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes” (Pro 18:6). “If any man...consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof

¹ odium – hatred.

² conducive to – likely to bring about.

³ disputatious – argumentative.

⁴ captiousness – fault-finding and raising petty objections.

cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth...From such withdraw thyself” (1Ti 6:3-5).

4. *Avoid a spirit of groundless jealousy.* Godly jealousy is necessary when we consider what we all are and by what influences we are surrounded. But an ill opinion of others is the source of much mischief. From this suspicious disposition, words are misconstrued⁵ and actions imputed to wrong motives. If we indulge in this, we shall be unable to believe one another or to place confidence in the most explicit declarations. “Jealousy is cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6). It devours the happiness of those who cherish it. How opposed to true charity! Charity suspecteth no evil, hopeth the best, believeth the most favorable representations. In general, a spirit of jealousy would seem to indicate a dishonest heart. Its possessors seem to know themselves to be bad and therefore think no others can be good. This probably made Satan so suspicious of Job’s sincerity. Beware lest you imitate him and lest your suspicions should originate in the same cause!

5. *Beware of a spirit of envy.* The members of a church are like the stars. One excelleth another. Then beware of envy. Saul envied David for his superiority when David “behaved himself wisely” (1Sa 18:15). Some excel in gifts and graces and consequently obtain a greater degree of esteem. Beware of envy. Some [surpass] others in worldly property and consequently, though not always deservedly, receive greater respect. But beware of envy. Do not imagine that religion cancels the obligation to treat men according to their rank and station in society. Let not envy lead you to think much of every instance of respect shown to a superior and to reflect, “If I had been *rich*, he would have visited *me*!” Certainly, a minister should visit all his flock; but there may be reasons, apart from outward circumstances, why one shall be visited more than another. “Charity envieth not” (1Co 13:4).

6. *Do not intermeddle with each other’s temporal affairs.* What I just now said respecting your conduct towards your pastor, I would repeat concerning your conduct towards one another. Different people have different ways of managing their domestic affairs; and if your brethren do but act [honorably] in the world, what right have you to interfere? If indeed their deportment be inconsistent with their character as professed Christians, and in any sense involve the honor of God; if, for example, they are [lazy] and disgrace the cause—or extravagant and therefore become unable to pay their just debts—then, indeed, it will

⁵ **misconstrued** – interpreted wrongly.

be right to interfere; but even then it is neither friendly nor wise to make their faults the topic of common conversation.

7. Guard against a touchy temper. Charity is not soon angry. “For every trifle scorn to take offence; It either shows great pride or little sense.”⁶

8. Repeat no grievances, especially when acknowledged. “He that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Pro 17:9).

9. Strive to heal differences. It is a great honor to be a peacemaker. True, it is often very difficult; for “a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle” (Pro 18:19). But by how much the more difficulty there is, by so much the more honor will there be. Do not abandon the attempt for a few hard sayings. Those who interfere in an affray⁷ commonly receive a few blows from both sides. But do not be discouraged. Pray, and try again. And let the saying of our Lord, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Mat 5:9), weigh more with you than a little temporary difficulty and discouragement.

10. Encourage no talebearers. Persons that make it their business and feel it their delight to go about telling secrets to the disadvantage of their neighbors deserve the deepest marks of censure. Are you at variance with a brother? Mark the man who by his insinuations and innuendoes⁸ would make the breach wider and shun him. There are cases indeed, in which, in our own vindication, we are compelled to speak to the disadvantage of others; but to blacken the character of another unnecessarily and intentionally to widen a breach existing between friends or neighbors is infernal! If “blessed are the peacemakers,” cursed are these peace-breakers and peace-preventers! One cannot always shut one’s doors against such characters, but we can and ought to shut our ears against them; and if we do this, we shall deprive them of their excitement and their highest gratification. “Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Pro 26:20)...And if you would not encourage talebearing in others, be sure you are not guilty of it yourselves. If you hear one speak ill of another, do not go and tell him, unless indeed it affects his moral character and the cause of religion; and never assist in propagating evil reports.

11. Be ready to forgive. Without this heavenly temper we cannot expect to live long in peace. There is a very mistaken notion of honor existing among men as if it lay in not yielding but in resenting an injury,

⁶ From *An Essay on Criticism*, Alexander Pope (1688-1744).

⁷ **affray** – fight.

⁸ **innuendos** – indirect remarks, usually suggesting something bad or rude.

whereas it is very plain that true honor consists in the very opposite. “The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression” (Pro 19:11). Our own interest should lead us to this; for in some things we shall need the forgiveness of our brethren; and what is of greater consequence still, we all need divine forgiveness. But Christ assured His disciples, “If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mat 6:15).

These, my brethren, are some of the dispositions, the cultivation of which will make for peace. Some of them may appear to you little; but great rivers flow from little springs. “How great a matter a little fire kindleth!” (Jam 3:5). These things you are to “follow after.” Sometimes you may be inclined to despair of obtaining peace by any means. But be not discouraged—“follow after.”

II. HAVING THUS EXPLAINED THE EXHORTATION OF THE APOSTLE, I SHALL ENDEAVOR TO ENFORCE IT.

1. Consider *how invaluable a blessing peace is*. It is closely connected with *church prosperity*; for the heavenly Dove “flies from the abodes of noise and strife.” And to *soul prosperity*. “Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2Co 13:11). See the blessedness of peace in those churches which have been careful to cultivate it...and see the wretched state of those where peace has been infringed upon...“Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down” (Isa 33:20).

2. Consider *what it cost our Lord Jesus Christ to obtain it*. Peace between us and God—between us and all holy intelligences—was brought about by Christ; and all our peace with one another is the price of His blood. “It pleased the Father...having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Col 1:19-20).

3. Consider *its influence on spectators*...friends, enemies, other churches, young converts!

From *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Memoirs, Sermons, Etc.*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 1 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 534-538.

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815): English Baptist pastor, theologian, and author; born in Soham, Cambridgeshire, England, UK.



The unity of the apostolic churches was grounded on the only thing they had in common—their common Christianity. Its bond was the common reception of the Holy Spirit, which exhibited itself in one calling, one faith, one baptism.—*Benjamin B. Warfield*

THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE

Anthony Burgess (d. 1664)

That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.—John 17:21

I The excellency and necessity of it appears in the vehement and affectionate prayer for it made by our Savior. When He puts the whole company of believers together, He [chooses] this as the most eminent: that they may be one. And although our Savior had not the Spirit in measure and so could not vainly repeat the same thing often, yet within a little space, He does four times mention this, [in] verses 21, 22, [and] 23. Now certainly, that thing which our Savior, in Whom the treasures of all wisdom are, did much press and urge, must needs be of very great [importance]. Here is not pardon of their sins, justification,¹ adoption,² glorification³ mentioned, but unity, as if the whole kingdom of grace and glory did consist in this. Obtain this and you have all. And our Savior, as He prayed then, so He preached love and unity, so that, whereas in matter of justification, He commended faith above all, in matter of sanctification, He comprehends all in love. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another” (Joh 13:34). A new commandment, not but that the duty was old, only envy and malice had so prevailed amongst the Jews that to love was a new thing, as if it had not been a duty required before. In John’s epistles, it is called both new and old (1Jo 2:7-8). And then again, new because there are new motives and a new pattern: “Love one another, as I have loved you” (Joh 15:12). There was never such a pattern and precedent before; so, it is not every kind of love and unity that will give content, but that which is in [the] highest degree of unity. It is added, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Joh 13:35). Not, “if ye work miracles,” “if ye cast out devils,” but “if you cast out discord and variance.” Therefore, there is not a greater scandal to religion and holiness than when those that do believe are as the Levite’s concubine that was cut into many pieces. Again, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (Joh 15:12). This is Christ’s commandment, as if there were nothing else He required but this; and as if this were not enough, “These things I command you, that ye love one another” (Joh

¹ **justification** – being declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ.

² **adoption** – being received into God’s family by faith in Christ.

³ **glorification** – final salvation when believers are conformed to Jesus and enter His presence.

15:17), as if He should have said, “If bare information will not do it, if instruction will not do it, I lay My command and charge upon you.”

2. It is a means to bring the world to believe the truth. This unity and love are a special means to bring the world to believe the truth and receive Christ. So that what the preaching of the Word, and gifts, indeed, miracles used to do, that unity and agreement may do. This is twice affirmed to be the [result] of unity: “that the world may believe thou hast sent me” (Joh 17:21). It is a special way to convince all the enemies of the truth. Thus, “shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (Joh 13:35)...Because the Spirit of God is communicated but in measure to the godly, they know but in part and so they love but in part, many errors and divisions we are prone to. Yet this is a very great stumbling block; and therefore, woe be to that godly man who by his pride, self-conceit, or erroneous doctrine shall bring such a scandal to religion. What if many perish in hell because of your [contrary] spirit?

It is true, there ought to be zeal against errors and corruption, though in the godly. You see when Peter did not walk right, Paul resisted him to the face and would not give place to him or other false teachers, “no, not for an hour” (Gal 2:5). Mark that, “no, not for an hour.” Some think, “Let them alone, they will recover themselves, they will do no hurt, truth needs not be afraid”; yet Paul was afraid that an hour’s forbearance might do hurt. Therefore, he adds that the truth of the gospel might continue amongst you, as if an hour’s forbearance might hinder the continuance of truth; so that we are to use Scripture zeal and Scripture means to convince even those that are godly, when erring in doctrine. Therefore, the Scripture does not commend a unity and love so as to let all errors and profaneness alone, but in that which is good. Unity in that which is truth and holiness is that which Christ means here in His prayer, and where this is, it is very potent to win all gainsayers. It is admirable to mollify the hearts of the opposers; hence it is so often reported of the primitive Christians that they were daily with one accord together. Therefore, the evangelist Luke records it at least five times, so that if nothing else should make you tender about causing any breaches in the church of God, this should: [by your disunity,] you do as much as lies in you to hinder any man that knows you ever to believe and to be converted.

From *Christ’s Prayer before His Passion*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 323-324; used by permission; heritagebooks.org.



THE WORK TO BE DONE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

—John 17:20-21

THE WORK THAT IS TO BE DONE BEFORE THIS UNITY CAN BE COMPLETE: There are many chosen ones who have not yet believed in Jesus Christ, and the church cannot be one until these are saved.

Here is work to be done—work to be done by instruments. These chosen ones are to believe. That is a work of grace, but they are to believe through our word. Brethren, if you would promote the unity of Christ's church, look after His lost sheep, seek out wandering souls! If you ask what is to be your word, the answer is in the text: it is to be concerning *Christ*. They are to believe in Him. Every soul that believes in Christ is built into the great gospel unity in its measure, and you will never see the church as a whole while there is one soul left unsaved for whom the Savior shed His precious blood.¹ Go out and teach His Word! Tell out the doctrines of grace as He has given you ability. Hold up Christ before the eyes of men, and you will be the means in God's hand of bringing them to believe in Him, and so the church shall be built up and made one.

Here is work for the beginning of the year. Here is work until the end of the year. Do not sit down and scheme, plot, and plan how this denomination may melt into the other; you leave that alone. Your business now is to go and “tell to sinners round what a dear Savior you have found,”² for that is God's way of using you to complete the unity of His church. Unless these be saved, the church is not perfect. That is a wonderful text that “they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40). That is to say, saints in heaven cannot be perfect unless *we* get there. What? The blessed saints in heaven not perfect except the rest of believers come there? So the Scripture tells us, for they would be a

¹ See FGB 264, *Precious Blood*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

² From “Jesus My All to Heaven Is Gone,” John Cennick (1718-1755), English hymnwriter.

part of the body and not a whole body. They cannot be perfect as a flock unless the rest of the sheep come there. They beckon us from the battlements of heaven and say to us, "Come up hither, for without you we cannot be one as Jesus Christ is one with His Father. We are an imperfect body until you come." And we from our position of grace turn round to the sinful world, and we say to the chosen of God from among that sinful world, "Come to Jesus! Trust Jesus! Believe in Him! For without you we cannot be perfect, nor can the heavenly ones themselves be, for there must be one complete church! The city must be walled all round; and if there is one gap in the wall, the city will not be one. Come, then, put your trust in Jesus, that His church may be one."

Here is prayer offered: Beloved, Christ prays for the unity of His church that all saints who have gone to heaven in days gone by, that all saints who live now, that all who ever live may be brought into the unity of the one life in Himself. We do not attach enough importance to the power of Christ's prayer, I fear. We think of Joshua fighting in the valley, but we forget our Moses with hands outstretched upon the hill...Christ's prayer for His people is the great motive force by which the Spirit of God is sent to us, and the whole church is kept filled with life; and the whole of that force is tending to this one thing—to unity. It is removing everything that keeps us from being one, it is working with all its divine omnipotence to bring us into a visible unity when Christ shall stand in the latter days upon the earth. Beloved, let us have hope for sinners yet unconverted. Christ is praying for them. Let us have hope for the entire body of the faithful. Christ is praying for their unity, and what He prays for must be effected. He never pleads in vain. He prays that the church may be one, and it is one. He prays that they may be perfect and complete, and it shall be amidst eternal hallelujahs.

Then, there was the result anticipated from the whole: "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." The effect of [the] sight of the complete church upon human minds will be overwhelming. Angels and principalities will look at Christ's perfect church with awe. They will all exclaim, "What a marvel! What a wonder! What a masterpiece of divine power and wisdom!" When they saw the foundation laid in the precious blood of Christ, they gazed long and wistfully;³ but when they see the whole church complete, every spire and pinnacle, and the great top-stone⁴ brought out with shouting, all built of precious jewels and pearls, fashioned like unto the similitude of a palace, why, they

³ **wistfully** – longingly expectant.

⁴ **top-stone** – stone at the summit of an arch, which holds the whole together.

will make heaven ring again and again. When the world was made, they sang for joy, but how shall the vaults of heaven echo when the church is all complete and the new creation shall have been perfected! What will be the effect upon men? Astonishment will be the effect upon angels, but what upon men? Why, the world, that wicked world which rejected Christ, that wicked crucifying world which would have none of Him and which now will have none of His people, that wicked world which hates His saints and has striven with all its might to pluck down the walls of His church, will believe, will be compelled to believe that God has sent His Son! They will bite their tongues with rage, they will gnash their teeth with horror, but there will be no doubt about it. Do not suppose that the world will ever be convinced to believe in Christ and to be saved by the unity of the church. It is not anticipated in this chapter that the world ever will be saved. That is not dreamed of the whole chapter through. The world is spoken of as something for which Christ does not pray, whose enlightenment is not anticipated; but that world, though it weeps, wails, curses, and abhors, shall be made distinctly to recognize the divinity of Christ's mission when it shall see the entire unity of the church.

Why, before my astonished gaze this morning, there seems to me to rise up as from a great sea of confusion a wondrous building. I see the first stone sunk into the depths of that sea dyed with blood, and I see the top of it just emerging above lofty waves of strife and confusion; and now I see other stones built on that, all of them dyed with blood—the first apostles, all of them martyrs. I see stone rising upon stone as age succeeds age. At first, nearly all the foundations are laid in the fair vermilion⁵ of martyrdom, but the structure rises. The stones are very different. They come from Asia, Africa, America, Europe. They are taken from among princes and from among peasants. These stones are very diverse. Perhaps while they were here, they scarcely recognized that they belonged to the same building, but there they are, and for one thousand eight hundred and sixty years that building goes on, and on, and on building, every stone being made ready. We know not how many more years that masterly edifice will take, but at the last, despite all the frowns of hell and all the power of devils, that edifice will be completed, not a single stone being lost, not one elect child of God being absent, and not one of those stones having suffered any injury nor been put out of its place; and the whole so fair, so matchless, such a display of power, wisdom, and love, that even the hateful ones whose

⁵ **vermilion** – vivid red or scarlet.

hearts are hard as adamant⁶ against the Most High will be compelled to say God must have sent Christ. They cannot restrain that confession when all the church shall be one as the Father is one with Christ. O happy day, dawn on our eyes and make us blessed.

The concluding suggestion [is] this: Are we part of that great unity? There is the question. It is not this morning, “Are you members of a Christian church?” “I know how you get at it,” you say. “Well, a certain number of churches are evangelical and orthodox. They make up orthodox Protestantism. Now, I am a Baptist. Very well. I am a Baptist, and the Baptist churches are orthodox; therefore, I am a Christian. I am an Episcopalian, and Episcopacy is one branch of Protestantism. Very well, I am a Protestant, I am a Christian.”

Ah, that is your carnal way of talking. You may be very grievously mistaken if that is your argument. But if you can go another way to work and say, “I have received eternal life; for I have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am given of the Father unto Him.” Why then, beloved, you come at it directly. Being one with Christ, you are one with His people; but you should, when you are looking for this unity, look not for an outward but for an inward thing. Do not look for a matter that is to be written on sheets of paper, on rolls and books, but look for a bond written on hearts, consciences, and souls. Do not be looking for all saints all in one room, but in Christ; all living upon heavenly bread and drinking of the wines on the lees⁷ well-refined that come from Christ Jesus. Look for a spiritual union, and you will find it. If you look for the other thing, you will not find it; and if you did find it, it would be a great and awful thing from which you might pray God to deliver His church. As spiritual men, look for spiritual unity, but first begin by asking whether you are spiritual yourselves. Have you been born into the family? Have you been washed with the blood? Have you passed from death unto life? For, if not, even if you could be in the body, you would be as a dead substance in the body working a fester, a gangrene, necessitating pain and suffering. You would be a thing accursed to be cast away.

But are you alive by the life of Christ? Does God dwell in you, and do you dwell in Him? Then, my dear brother, give me your hand. Never mind about a thousand differences. If you are in Christ and I am in Christ, we cannot be two, we must be one. Let us love each other with

⁶ **adamant** – stone once believed to be impenetrable in its hardness.

⁷ **wines on the lees** – wine that has been strengthened by leaving the lees—dead yeast particles at the bottom of the wine container—in the wine after the fermentation process.

a pure heart fervently. Let us live on earth, as those who are to live together a long eternity in heaven. Let us help each other's spiritual growth. Let us aid each other as far as possible in every holy, spiritual enterprise, which is for the promotion of the kingdom of the Lord; and let us chase out of our hearts everything that would break the unity that God has established. Let us cast from us every false doctrine, every false thought of pride, of enmity, of envy, of bitterness, that we whom God has made one may be one before men, as well as before the eye of the heart-searching God. May the Lord bless us, dear friends, as a church, make us one and keep us so; for it will be the dead stuff among us that will make the divisions. It is the living children of God that make the unity. It is the living ones that are bound together. There will be no fear about that. Christ's prayer takes care of us that we shall be one. As for those of you who are joined with us in visible fellowship and are not one with Christ, may the Lord save you with His great salvation, and His shall be the praise. Amen and Amen.

From a sermon delivered on Sunday morning, January 7, 1866,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.



Now, does not experience tell us that where divisions and discord are, there is no love, no compassion, no watching over one another? If this unity were established, a man would then endeavor the growth of grace in others as in his own self. And therefore, observe whether the power of godliness does not much abate when differences do arise. There is not that heavenly communion nor hearty concurrence in the ways of holiness.—*Anthony Burgess*

This unity and peace may consist in the ignorance of many truths and in the holding of some errors, or else this duty of peace and unity could not be practicable [*capable of being done*] by any on this side perfection. But we must now endeavor the unity of the Spirit, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13).

As this unity and peace may consist in the ignorance of many truths and in the holding some errors, so it must consist with—and it cannot consist without—the believing and practicing those things which are necessary to salvation and church communion; and they are (1) believing that Christ the Son of God died for the sins of men, (2) that whoever believeth ought to be baptized, [and] (3) the third thing essential to this communion is a holy and a blameless conversation [*lifestyle*].

This unity and peace mainly consist in unity of love and affection; this is the great and indispensable duty of all Christians. By this they are declared Christ's disciples, and hence it is that love is called the great commandment, the old commandment, and the new commandment—that which was commanded in the beginning, and will remain to the end; yes, and after the end. "Charity never faileth"

(1Co 13:8)...Let us, therefore, live in unity and peace, and the
God of love and peace will be with us.

—*John Bunyan*

THE EXCELLENCE OF UNITY

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646)

WHAT now remains but that we may join in love and peace one with another? Surely nothing can stop us but our extreme, corrupt, perverse hearts.

The apostle Paul is deeply earnest in his desires in his exhortation for this peace: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1Co 1:10). The word translated “perfectly joined” signifies such a joining as when a bone is out of joint and is perfectly set right again.

So, Philippians 2:1-3 [reads]: “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife.” The apostle poured forth his soul in this exhortation; it is a heartbreaking exhortation.

I find also in a letter that Martin Bucer¹ wrote to a godly minister a very lofty expression of that high esteem he had of and earnest desires after the curing of divisions. “Who would not,” said he, “purchase with his life the removing of that infinite scandal that comes by dissension?” Oh, that there were such hearts in us! Christ expects it from us all, but especially from His ministers, for they are His ambassadors for peace, to beseech men in His stead to be reconciled to God. Reconciliation with God will reconcile us one to another. “If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1Jo 4:11).

The faces of the cherubim³ in the temple looked towards another, which some think signified the agreement that should exist among ministers of the gospel. So, the six branches in the candlestick joined all in one. Those who hold the light of truth before others should be united in peace as one among themselves. The first thing Christ’s ministers were to do when they came to any place was to say, Peace be to that place. If any sons of peace were there, they were to abide; otherwise not.

¹ **Martin Bucer (1491-1551)** – leader in the European and English Reformation.

² **dissension** – disagreement that produces strife or contention.

³ **cherubim** – winged angelic beings who serve God.

Surely then, it is expected that they themselves should be sons of peace. The contentions of private Christians are offensive, but the contentions of ministers are a scandal for all to witness. Yet in all ages of the church, the corrupt clergy have been the greatest cause of divisions. They have been of the cruelest spirits against any who differed from them. But let not such a spirit be in us. We have enough to do to contend with the wicked of the world, with the malice of Satan; let us not contend one with another.

Luther,⁴ writing to the ministers of Nuremberg, envisioned Christ saying to them, “You are likely to suffer evil enough for My name; you need not be afflictions one to another.” It was barbarousness in the priests of Baal to cut and slash themselves, but it is worse for the ministers of Jesus Christ to cut and slash one another...

Who will believe that you bring the oracles of God with you when they see by your froward,⁵ contentious carriage⁶ that you never entered in at these doors? People cannot but think it a miserable thing to have a scratching, tearing bramble to be over them. Oh, that God would set the beauty and glory of peace, friendship, and love before us! That this precious pearl, *union*, might be highly valued by us! All men are taken in some degree or other with the excellency and sweetness of love and friendship...

Evagrius,⁷ in his *Ecclesiastical History*, recorded an epistle of Cyril of Alexandria,⁸ written to John of Antioch⁹ in response to a pacificatory epistle¹⁰ from John to him. His spirit was so taken with it that he broke forth thus: “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; the wall of [resentment] is battered down, the boiling [anger] that bereaved the minds of quietness is purged from among us, and all the occasion of discord and dissension is banished away, for our Savior Jesus Christ has granted peace unto the churches under heaven”...

Harmonious, peaceable, uniting dispositions have much of God in them. If not from sanctifying grace, yet it is from a common work of the Spirit of God. There is a nobleness in such a heart...Gentleness, mercy, goodness, love, and tenderness toward others’ sufferings are the greatest ornaments to a noble spirit. If this be sanctified, the glory of

⁴ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German leader of the Protestant Reformation.

⁵ **froward** – difficult to deal with.

⁶ **carriage** – behavior.

⁷ **Evagrius Scholasticus** (c. 536-594) – Syrian scholar and intellectual.

⁸ **Cyril of Alexandria** (c. 375-444) – Christian bishop and theologian.

⁹ **John of Antioch** (d. 441) – Bishop of Antioch, defended Nestorius against Cyril.

¹⁰ **pacificatory epistle** – letter written to bring peace.

God shines bright indeed in such a heart. For God glories in being the God of peace and love. “The very God of peace” (1Th 5:23). “The Lord of peace himself” (2Th 3:16). Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. The Holy Ghost is like a dove that has no gall.¹¹ The gospel is the gospel of peace. The kingdom of God is peace as well as righteousness. The legacy that Christ left is a legacy of peace. The apostolic benediction is grace, mercy, and peace. The glory of the church is in this: that it is a city covenanted in unity within itself. Yes, this will be the glory of that glorious church that God is raising, a new Jerusalem. There shall be no more crying there (Rev 21:4).

“The Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one” (Zec 14:9). There is but one Lord now, but He is called by different names; but in that day, His name shall be but one. “Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent” (Zep 3:9). The Hebrew word [translated] “with one consent” is “with one shoulder.” Now we shoulder one another, but then all shall serve the Lord with one shoulder. This love and peace are compared to the most delightful and the most profitable things. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion” (Psa 133:1-3).

There are many promises made to this effect. One is Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Another is 2 Corinthians 13:11: “Be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” In John 15:12, Christ says this is His commandment, “That ye love one another.” In verse 14, He says, “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” By loving others, we not only get them to be our friends, but Christ too.

I think I see Christ here *pleading for love*, as one who had to deal with two men who were at some variance, persuading them to peace and love: “Come, you shall pass by all former things. You shall be made friends. By this you shall gain Me also to be a friend to you as long as I live”...

Brotherly love has a blessing going along with it. God loves it exceedingly, for it does much for the glory of God. And to what purpose do we live if God does not have glory by us? In Romans 15:5-7, the apostle first prayed that the God of patience and consolation would grant them

¹¹ **gall** – bitterness; ill-will.

to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, that they may with one mind and one mouth glorify God. Then he exhorted, “Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Much of God’s glory depends upon our union. Yea, God stands so much upon this that He is willing to wait for His worship until we are at peace one with another. “Leave there thy gift before the altar...first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Mat 5:23-24). It is as if He should say, “My worship can wait until you be reconciled. I love My worship, and desire it much, but I must have peace and love among yourselves first. I will wait for that.”

But I beseech you, let us not make God wait too long. Remember, while you are wrangling and quarreling, God waits on you all this while. If children should be quarreling, and one comes to them and says, “Your father waits for you,” it is time for them to break off. Be not unmannerly with God in making Him wait so long for you. Some of you have made Him wait upon you for an acceptable duty of worship many weeks, yes, it may be, many months; and yet your spirits are not in temper to offer any sacrifice to God. What a fearful evil is it then to stand out in a stubborn, sullen, dogged¹² manner, refusing to be reconciled!

Last, the saints’ enjoyment of the sweetness of love, peace, and unity among themselves—what is it but heaven upon earth? Heaven is above all storms, tempests, and troubles. Its happiness is perfect rest. We pray that the will of God might be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Why may we not have a heaven upon earth? This would sweeten all our comforts, yes, all our afflictions. But the devil envies us this happiness. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!...

And now I say, as the apostle did in 2 Thessalonians 3:5: “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.” Let me add, “and into the love of one another.” Let us all study peace, seek peace, follow peace, pursue peace, and the God of peace be with us.

From *Irenicum* (London: Robert Dawlman, 1653), 296-302;
in the public domain.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646): English Congregational pastor; born in Essex, England, UK.



Let us bear much, concede much, and put up with much before
we plunge into secessions and separations.

—J. C. Ryle

¹² **dogged** – bad-tempered.