

# Unity of Spirit and Faith

*“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:  
for there the LORD  
commanded the  
blessing, even life  
for evermore.”*  
—Psalm 133:1-3

resulted.

## **A HARMONIOUS SPIRIT**

of goodwill among people is a blessed condition, whether it be in the home, the community, business relationships, social life, and particularly when it is found in the associations of the Lord’s consecrated people. For these “brethren,” as David calls them, to dwell together in unity is “good and . . . pleasant.” The experiences of the brethren throughout the Gospel Age attest to this. Conversely, where there has been envy and strife, whatever the cause might be, a corresponding lack of good and pleasant fellowship has

In our text, David used two illustrations to bring to our attention how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. First, he referred to one of the features connected with Israel's Tabernacle services. He calls our attention to the holy anointing oil which was poured upon the head of Israel's High Priest. There was doubtless a rich fragrance to this oil that was very pleasant to the priest, and to those who were in his presence.—Exod. 30:23-31; Lev. 8:12

The second illustration which David used was the dew that fell upon Mount Hermon, and upon other "mountains of Zion." In Israel, where there was little or no rain during the dry seasons of the year, some much-needed moisture fell upon the hills and mountains in the form of heavy dew at night. This doubtless helped to keep a little water in the streams of that dry land during periods of great need. Sweet and refreshing, then, would be the dew that fell upon the mountains of Zion. It had certain life-giving qualities, as David says, "For there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore."

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We believe that the holy anointing oil poured upon the head of Israel's High Priest was a symbolic foregleam of the Holy Spirit which came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism. It is referred to in the Scriptures as the "oil of gladness" with which Jesus was anointed "above" all other fellow human beings. (Heb. 1:9) It brought joy to Jesus' own heart, and it empowered him to be a proclaimer of glad tidings for the comfort of others.—Luke 4:16-21; Isa. 61:1-3

The anointing of the Holy Spirit which came upon Jesus began to flow down to his consecrated footstep followers starting at Pentecost. Just as the anointing of the High Priest of Israel was upon his head, and then ran down to the other parts of his body, so the anointing of the Holy Spirit was symbolically poured upon Jesus, our “head,” and we receive of that anointing by being accepted as members of his “body.” (I Cor. 12:12; Col. 1:18) Thus, the Apostle John states that the anointing which we have received from the Father, through his Son, abides in us.—I John 2:27

The Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit. It is the power of his thoughts which is to direct our minds, words and deeds. Its influence is the same in the life of every dedicated follower of the Master. Therefore, to the extent that we yield to this holy power we will find ourselves in unity with one another. To the extent that we resist the Holy Spirit, and insist upon our own ways and preferences, there will almost assuredly be disunity among us.

## **THROUGH THE WORD**

The power of God’s thoughts reaches us through his written Word, the Bible, provided by him through the ministry of his faithful servants, the prophets, apostles, and our Lord Jesus. “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” Peter informs us. (II Pet. 1:21) This is a reference to the inspired prophets of the Old Testament and including John the Baptist. The ministry of these prophets was, in turn, passed on to the church through the apostles, who also performed their ministry under the inspiration and power of

“the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.”—I Pet. 1:12

Jesus’ anointing by the Holy Spirit empowered him miraculously to reveal the thoughts of God through his teachings. Thus, the Bible becomes the inspired Word of God, and it is through obedience to its teachings that the Lord’s consecrated people are brought together. By keeping humble before him, they are able to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Paul refers to this with these words: “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”—Eph. 4:3

According to the flesh, the Lord’s people are all imperfect, and each one is unique. There are differences of nationality, age, and religious background, and there are differences of temperament and abilities. The Holy Spirit, however, through the written Word, points out the one course for all to follow, and it is our faithfulness in following this course which results in the unity of the Spirit. This means that a disposition of humility, as well as the spirit of love, must be at the center of our thinking at all times. Paul wrote concerning this mindset, encouraging us to deal with our brethren in “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”—Eph. 4:2

Paul specified the basic essentials of our unity in Christ. “There is one body.” (vs. 4) This is the body of Christ. In the preceding chapters of this epistle Paul reminds us of one of the things which tended to disrupt the full unity of the brethren in the Early Church. It was the fact that Gentiles were coming into the congregations, and being accepted by God as “fellowcitizens” with the Jewish converts,

and sharers in the “commonwealth of Israel”—that is, counted as spiritual Israelites. (Eph. 2:11-19) It was difficult for many of the Jewish believers to accept this situation fully. Doubtless also some of the Gentiles might well have felt somewhat out of place meeting with Jewish people. This placed a strain upon their overall spirit of unity.

Nevertheless, they all were to endeavor to maintain the unity which God purposed should come through the Holy Spirit. They were not to suppose that there was one body of Christ for Gentile believers, and another body of Christ for Jewish believers. There was only one body, Paul said, then adding, “and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” Thus, so far as God’s purpose during this Gospel Age is concerned, there is but one arrangement for both Jews and Gentiles.

While this particular issue was prominent in the Early Church, throughout the age there have been other situations, locally and generally, among God’s consecrated people which have tested the genuineness of their desire to maintain the unity of the Spirit. To the extent that the brethren have followed the instructions of the written Word with humility and love, they have enjoyed the blessedness of unity in Christ, which, as our text declares, has been both good and pleasant. In cases where the influences of the Holy Spirit, through the written Word, have been ignored, this blessedness has been marred.

## **ONE LORD, ONE FAITH**

Our unity in Christ is also based upon our common belief in the “one Lord,” and “one faith.” (Eph. 4:5)

Those enlightened by the Word of truth have learned that there are not multiple “Lords,” somehow mysteriously combined into one divine being. On the contrary, God Almighty, our Heavenly Father, is the one supreme Lord of the universe. He has been pleased to appoint his Son, Jesus, as mankind’s Redeemer, who gave himself a “ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:3-6) He is our “advocate,” by whom we have access to the Father. (I John 2:1) He is our “good shepherd,” who leads and cares for us as his sheep. (John 10:14) He is our Head, through which the will of God is expressed as the guide of our lives. (Eph. 1:22,23) Indeed, he is our “Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.”—I Cor. 8:6

What a harmonious group of doctrines, our “most holy faith,” is centered in Jesus. (Jude 20) These make up the “one faith” which is the light and inspiration of our lives. The creation and fall of man; the Abrahamic promise of deliverance from sin and death; the coming of Christ at his First Advent to redeem mankind from death; the High Calling of this Gospel Age; the return and second presence of Christ; the establishment of his kingdom for the blessing of all the families of the earth. These are the soul-satisfying core teachings of our faith.

Our unity of the Spirit is based upon the fundamental doctrines of God’s plan. The question might be raised as to how we are to determine what are the fundamental doctrines. We suggest that the central teachings of our most holy faith are those which can be firmly established by a “Thus saith the Lord,” or to state it another way, by the confirmation of multiple “witnesses” of the Scriptures

and by the “sure word of prophecy.” (Isa. 44:6-8; Rev. 11:3; II Pet. 1:19-21) This is true of doctrines we have mentioned, and of other fundamental truths of God’s plan.

There are certain viewpoints toward which we lean that we might find difficult to establish directly by the Bible. These are generally based upon reasoning. We like a particular thought, and it seems reasonable to us, but perhaps other brethren disagree with us. They have reasoned from a different standpoint, and perhaps from a background that varies from ours. These concepts are not to be pressed upon our brethren from either side. They can be discussed to a reasonable degree if they do not cause conflicts, unless, of course, they are in direct opposition to basic principles of truth.

It is well to keep in mind that we cannot maintain the unity of the Spirit by insisting that all in the ecclesia conform to our ideas. Rather, all should want to conform to the Lord’s ideas, and we can know whether or not they are his by applying the simple test of their credibility by, as already stated, a “Thus saith the Lord.” For other ideas and thoughts we may have, we should be very careful never to present them in a dogmatic spirit, if, indeed, we feel the need to do so at all. We are to remember that if our ideas are not clearly expressed in the Bible, it is most likely true that the Lord does not consider them indispensable to our understanding.

## **NOT DISTORTION**

It would not be proper to say that the fundamental truths of our faith are the non-controversial doctrines of the Bible. In reality, none of these doctrines

are universally accepted by the professed people of God. For example, the clear statement that “the wages of sin is death” would seem to be the end of all controversy as to what constitutes the divine penalty for sin. However, to many, death does not mean the same thing that it does to those enlightened by the anointing of God’s Holy Spirit.

Here enters the matter of interpretation. The Scriptures can be wrested and distorted. Those, however, who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit to know and understand God’s plans and purposes, have learned that the basic teachings embraced in this plan are founded upon plain statements of the Word of God. As such, they are not subject to interpretation without distorting the plain meaning of words, with which the Lord would not be pleased. It is these teachings, the harmonious plan of God as a whole, that constitute the “one faith” which is the basis of our unity in the Spirit.

Paul mentions the “unity of the Spirit” and the “unity of the faith.” (Eph. 4:3,13) We might think that what he meant by the unity of the Spirit is simply a tolerant, kind attitude toward others, regardless of what they believe. At the same time, we might also think that unity of the faith is an ideal for which we should strive, but will probably never attain. This differentiation does not seem to be Paul’s viewpoint. When he speaks of the unity of the Spirit, his reference is to the Holy Spirit, which is the holy influence of God that reaches us through his written Word.

In this chapter, Paul informs us that God’s Word has been communicated to us by servants whom he has provided—apostles, prophets, evangelists,



pastors and teachers—and that the work of these is of vital importance. It is for the “perfecting of the saints, . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature [maturity] of the fulness of Christ. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”—Eph. 4:11-16

## **UNITY OF SPIRIT AND FAITH**

From Paul’s exhortation it is clear that unity of the Spirit finds its full fruition in unity of the faith. Lack of unity of the faith implies failure to attain “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” It implies being in a position where we might easily be “carried about with every wind of doctrine.” We know how important this matter is when we realize that stability in the faith and maturity in Christ are essential to be worthy to live and reign with him for the future blessing of the world.

Paul mentions our “speaking the truth in love” as being associated with growing up into Christ in all things. This is related to our use of the Truth. The proper use of the Truth, in addition to our belief in it, is also one of the fundamentals of our

unity in Christ. One of the purposes for which God gave us an understanding of his plan is that we might be its ministers. We are to hold forth the Word of life, and by doing this, to be the light of the world. (Phil. 2:15,16; Matt. 5:14) These are the instructions given to us in the Scriptures, and it is essential to heed them if we are to experience in rich measure how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

Speaking the Truth in love will help us grow up into Christ in “all things,” not merely in some things. We are to appreciate Christ, and emulate him in all the wonderful manifestations of godlikeness we see in him. We are to imitate Christ in patience and in kindness, just as he has imitated God. We are to be courageous in upholding truths which are unpopular, and which are contrary to errors that are popular in this present world. We are to lay down our lives for one another as Christ laid down his life for us. We are to be obedient to the Word of truth even as he was obedient to all which his Father desired concerning him, saying, “I delight to do thy will, O my God.”—Ps. 40:8; John 4:34

Thus we see that unity of the Spirit is based on the great fundamentals of the faith and the proper application of these truths in our lives, being doers of the Word, and not just hearers. (James 1:22-25) We are to keep this unity of the Spirit “in the bond of peace.” Peace and goodwill among ourselves, and a loving, enthusiastic cooperation in the ministry of the Truth are possible only within the framework of the basic doctrines of the Scriptures. Let us “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”—Heb. 10:23

## **NOT BY COMPROMISE**

Unity based upon compromise of fundamental truth is not the unity of the Spirit, and will not be “good and pleasant.” To maintain an outward show of unity by ignoring one or more of the basic teachings of the Word of God is not pleasing to the Lord. This might appear to be a method of practice that would result in a larger attendance at our meetings, but it seldom works out this way, except perhaps temporarily. Jesus told us that God is selecting a “little flock” from the world, a “people for his name,” and “few there be” that would walk in the narrow way of sacrifice. (Luke 12:32; Acts 15:14; Matt. 7:14) Under such arrangements this will not result in large numbers in any one generation.

God is now calling and preparing this little flock to be his instruments of blessing during the next age. It will be then that a knowledge of his plans and purposes will fill the whole earth. It will be then that he will turn to the people a pure language, that they might all call upon him to serve him in unity and oneness. (Isa. 11:9; Zeph. 3:9) The whole world will then be united to serve the Lord, but again, not by compromising his truths or laws of righteousness, but by learning and obeying them willingly, from their hearts. Meanwhile, it is our privilege now to grow in grace and in knowledge that we may know and do God’s will more perfectly. In doing this we will find ourselves in sweet accord with all others who are likewise following the leadings of the Holy Spirit and are obedient to the truths of our most holy faith.

Jesus prayed for the oneness of his body members. He desired that they might be one just as he

and his Heavenly Father were one. (John 17:21) This prayer will not be fully answered while we are still in the flesh. However, this gives us no excuse for not keeping before us this ideal standard of good and pleasant Christian fellowship. It is even now attainable in our hearts. The imperfections of the flesh will, at times, blur our vision and hinder us from measuring up fully to the teachings of the Word. However, we must strive against these weaknesses, and as we strive against them we will become more mature in Christ.

Perhaps at no previous time in the experiences of the Lord's people has it been so important for all of us to distinguish clearly the basic truths of the Scriptures, and adhere to them tenaciously. If it were necessary, all the Lord's consecrated should be willing to die for the truth of God's plan. It is his Word that will continue to point the way concerning the will of God for us. It will guide all the truly meek and humble in the same way, and we will find ourselves in a sweet and blessed unity with one another, not only in the belief of the Truth, but also in the manner in which it is being applied in our lives.

In our text the psalmist wrote that good and pleasant unity of the Spirit is like "the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." The dew could well be, in this instance, a symbol of the refreshing blessings found in the Word of God. It is through the inspiration of these invigorating truths, and our obedience to them, that we enjoy unity with the brethren.

However, our text implies more than this, “for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” It is those who attain a large measure of the Spirit of unity who are on the way to “life forevermore.” God is interested in seeing how well we are now yielding ourselves to the unifying influences of his Holy Spirit in this life. Upon the basis of this manifestation of our heart loyalty to him now, we will be given the reward of “glory and honour and immortality,” when we have finished our earthly course, and have been found “faithful unto death.”—Rom. 2:7; Rev. 2:10

In summary, the Lord is not merely saying that he would like, or prefer, to see us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. Rather, his Word reveals that this is one of the requirements of all those to whom he will eventually say, “Well done.” (Matt. 25:20-23) This does not mean that we will attain perfect unity any more than we will attain perfection in the flesh with respect to any of the Lord’s requirements. Yet, it is to be one of the basic objectives of our endeavors as body members of Christ. Let us continue to strive for it, and rejoice as we look ahead to the time when God commands the blessing, “even life for evermore!” ■

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*In one Spirit were we all baptized into one body,  
whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free;  
and were all made to drink of one Spirit.”  
—I Corinthians 12:13*