

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

25. ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

We read much in the New Testament about Christian unity. The strength and beauty of the church consists in the oneness between Christ and his people. How powerful were the pleadings of our great Advocate for the unity of his redeemed people "Holy Father, keep through your own name, those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are;" "that they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me. And the glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity; and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them, as you have loved me."

Paul also dwells much on this important subject, "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body—and have all been made to drink into one spirit." "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind." "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you: but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

From our Lord's intercessory prayer, we learn that all who are the subjects of grace, are the gift of the Father to the Son; that to such the Son gives eternal life; that the beginning of this eternal life is to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent; that this knowledge is imparted by Jesus Christ through the teaching of the Spirit of truth, the Comforter; that this knowledge is of a sanctifying nature; that it leads to a separation from the world, and a union to each other; that these happy souls are kept from the evil that is in the world, and preserved unto eternal glory.

Hence, all strife, divisions, and contentions, disfigure the beauty and tarnish the glory of the church of God. Paul sharply reproves the Corinthian church for their lack of unity: "You are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?" While to the Ephesian converts he gives this beautiful exhortation: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

It may be asked, "Is it possible that all who profess to believe in the truths of the Bible, will ever be brought to see everything in the same light, and to follow, in every minute particular, the same track of thinking and acting?" This unity may, and ought to be maintained, in the grand essentials of the Gospel. And a beautiful union of faith and practice, of sentiment and feeling, does exist among real Christians of all denominations, however they may differ about the terms and explications of some abstruse doctrines, or respecting the outward forms and modes of church government: "for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power?" "It is not food and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." When these holy characters freely unbosom their hearts to each other, and discourse together on experimental and practical subjects, they find themselves standing on one common ground—connected by one common tie—united in one common cause—and drinking into one and the self-same spirit.

They all mourn over, and are deeply humbled, on account of the corruption of their nature and the sin of their lives. They all feel the plague of their own hearts, and so groan, being burdened. They all are conscious of their utter inability to save themselves. They all know that they are naturally without strength. They are all enabled, through grace, to look unto Jesus, the eternal Son of God, as their only Savior, whose blood cleanses them from all sin; whose merits, received and applied by faith, form their only justifying righteousness; whose intercession for them prevails with God; whose promised gift, the Spirit of truth, dwells in their hearts, causing them to cry with filial love and confidence, Abba, Father.

They all know and feel that they thus become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; and, enjoying the presence and grace of their heavenly Father through the Son of his love, they are all enabled to resist the devil, to crucify the flesh, to renounce the world, and gradually to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

They all confess how low their highest efforts fall beneath the elevated standard of Gospel holiness; yet, forgetting the things which are behind, they press forward towards those things which are before, and long for that happy period, when, having laid down their bodies of sin and death, they shall shine in spotless purity in the courts above.

With these feelings and impressions, they all confess themselves to be pilgrims and strangers upon earth. Their hearts are set upon things above. They sympathize with each other's sorrows, and gladden with each other's joy. They love to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

As they all believe in the glorious doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, and in the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, so they unitedly confess themselves to be sinners saved by grace through faith in a crucified Redeemer,

and ascribe all their salvation, from first to last, to the free, unmerited mercy of God in Christ. Thus, while they acknowledge the justice of that sentence which condemns them, as sinners, to everlasting misery, they extol the vastness of that love which so freely saves them from the wrath to come. With these holy views of the truth, they can each say from the heart,

"My power is lost—the fault is wholly mine;
Yet bid me live—the glory shall be thine."

Now, if every faithful follower of Jesus can subscribe to these common points of Christian doctrine and experience, what is it that divides and separates the true family of Christ? Is it not the remaining corruption of our nature, the remaining darkness of our mind, and the subtle enemy of our souls? These are the foes which disturb the peace of the Church, and destroy much of her purity and spiritual prosperity.

Oh! that the Holy Spirit may purge away this old leaven of malice and wickedness, and fill us with sincerity and truth; that we may become a new lump; be all new creatures in Christ Jesus; shine as lights in the world; and so advance that kingdom of holiness upon earth, which is criminally impeded in its progress, and marred in its beauty, by the disfiguring contentions, strifes, and divisions of those who call themselves the followers of the Lamb.

In the 'revelation of mercy', as in the visible works of creation, there are mysteries which our finite minds cannot fathom; for what is man that he should be wise as his Maker? And yet how many dare to reject the oracles of God, because they cannot comprehend their elevated truths, or square their seemingly discordant statements with their preconceived systematic opinions.

The word of God is "as a city which is at unity with itself." All is plain and clear to the divine Mind, who sees the end from the beginning, and who knows the infinitely varied movements of his own vast design. We see but a small part of his ways. Many a wheel enters into those darkneses of his impenetrable counsel, which we cannot trace. But still it is moving onward in direct progression towards that glorious period, when the whole stupendous work of mercy shall be displayed to the Church triumphant in heaven, and call forth her eternal songs of praise. There, in that bright world, those saints of God who differed here below respecting some mysterious points of deep concealment, will see with one vision.

The darkness being gone, the veil being withdrawn, and the truth standing fully revealed to their enraptured souls in all its beauty, symmetry, and perfection, they will then utter no jarring sentiment; feel no uncharitable emotion; experience no shyness of approach; but, wrapped in holy admiration and humble reverence before the throne of God, every feeling will be love, and every view of the truth in perfect accordance with the mind and will of their Creator. There, with one heart and mouth, they will glorify God and the Lamb, join in the same song, delight in the same work; being, in every sense, one in the presence of Him who, when upon earth, interceded for his people: "The glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are One. I in them, and you in me, that they may be made perfect in unity." Well, then, might the apostle say to the Corinthians, when lamenting their unhappy dissensions, "Are you not carnal and walk as men;" as people unconverted, as men destitute of the Spirit of Christ?

While we remain in the body, differences of opinion on points confessedly mysterious must be expected; but may not this be designed by Infinite Wisdom, for the exercise of charity and patience towards each other, provided the great essentials of genuine Christianity are maintained and practically believed?

This incapacity of our minds to grasp the mighty design of everlasting love towards creatures helpless in themselves, and unable to come to God, (John vi, 44,) and yet chargeable with the guilt of not coming to him, (John v, 40,) should teach us humility and entire dependence on the Spirit of truth, to direct us aright in the way of life and salvation.

The more we know ourselves, the more we shall learn to renounce our own reasonings, and to follow simply the direction of that blessed word which is given us to be a light unto our feet and a lamp unto our path. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walks in darkness, knows not where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light."

"Merciful Lord, be pleased to, 'cast your bright beams of light upon your church,' that all your people, being enlightened by the doctrines of your word, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length they may attain to everlasting life. Preserve me, your unworthy servant, from that unhallowed curiosity which would presumptuously pry into those deep things around which you have thrown an impenetrable veil. Give me a mind enlightened to discover the truth as it is in Jesus; and a heart to love and practice the truth, as it is revealed to my soul in the fullness of Christian charity, enable me to say, 'grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;' and to call every one a brother who bears your holy image, takes up his cross, and follows you."

Sweet is the joy of those possessed,
Who know and love the Lord;
No guilty fears disturb their rest,
While leaning on his word.
Amid the ruffling scenes of life,

ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

**They trust a covenant God;
While all the angry sons of strife
Despise his chastening rod.
Jesus to them his peace imparts,
To them his presence gives;
He dwells by faith in all their hearts,
And all their needs relieves.
Thus, holy Lord, may I be blessed
With graces from above;
Until peace and joy reign in my breast,
The fruit of dying love.**