

Articles and Sermons :: Convincing Evidence

Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/10/31 9:48

Convincing Evidence

by T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 1 - This Matter of Christian Unity

“By this shall all men know” (John 13:35). “That the world may believe” (John 17:21).

Unity as a Priority in Witness

Some battles are lost before a blow is struck or a shot fired. Others are only partly won and much enemy territory uncaptured because of sabotage behind the campaign. To change the metaphor, which is quite in keeping with the matter in hand, some buildings which have cost much in time, labour, and means, become leaky, discredited and sometimes disintegrate, because of a lie in the foundations. Sooner or later it finds the builders out. It is therefore a matter of considerable, if not absolute, importance that we have a right and adequate basis of assurance for certain success BEFORE WE START. For, if a start is made without this basis, early reverse or arrest may take place, or at most some way will be made only to find that crippling troubles bring serious limitations and heartbreaks. The FULL end can never be reached if the beginning or basis is faulty.

Let us firstly look at this matter of Christian unity as it is viewed today. That there is a real and considerable regret for the existing condition needs no arguing: there is! But while that is so, there are different or various reactions to it. Many feel that the situation is so far gone and established that it is just pure idealism and a counsel of perfection to think and hope for an adequate change. They have therefore surrendered to a counsel of despair and taken the attitude that we must do the best we can under the circumstances and make the best of a bad job. Others have resolved the problem — to their own satisfaction — by saying that there is good in every part, however divided the parts may be, and we must take the good, make the most of it, and try to ignore the bad. Such a position carried to its logical issue could result in a rapprochement in the most diverse realms, and there is no end to it. There are yet others who take a purely spiritual position and say that we are “all one in Christ”, and the earthly situation must be ignored. This is an unreal, unsubstantial position which evades or bypasses facts which are a contradiction to it, and still leaves the world without what Christ said is needed “that the world may believe”. This does not mean that the last mentioned position is not the true starting point for the rest; it is, but it is not enough, and falls short of the world-convincing evidence. There are other more or less definite reactions to this situation, but they are all as superficial as those mentioned.

Many, taking one or other of these attitudes, because of the immensity of the difficulty, have decided that the thing to do is to get on with the job, be “practical”, and leave these matters to those whose inclination it is to spend time on them. For such it is not “practical”, but a waste of time, to go back to the chart room and make sure that, with all the good motive, the labour, cost, and devotion, we are after all on the right course or in a position to achieve the purpose. To return to the metaphor used earlier, it is of SOME consequence that we do not carry in our very make-up, though not realised, the elements of defeat and disintegration.

Through the centuries and at this time in a very saddening way the work of God is handicapped in so many of its fresh efforts even before they are launched. In his sermon class, when students were preaching sermons with a view to advice and instruction on how to preach or NOT to preach, Mr. Spurgeon listened while a young man built up a sermon on “The Whole Armour of God”. Graphically and with some zest the student pictured himself as taking up and putting on the armour piece by piece, and waxing more and more pleased with his effort he flauntingly cried at last: “Now, where is the devil?” Mr. Spurgeon cupped his hands round his mouth and called in an audible whisper — “He is inside the armour!”

Is this not so very much the case in the church on this earth? With all the grandeur of her message, the truth of her doctrine, the cost of her work, she is so largely defeated. There is something inside telling against her. The convincingness of oneness, real unity, is sabotaged.

The fact is that the church — by which is meant Christians in their relatedness — is much more ready to do, launch out in, and undertake Christian work, than she is to secure the essential for its success.

But we must get to grips with the situation, for this is not an accusation, or mere statement of a case; we have to do something to at least indicate ways of healing of this open sore.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/10/31 9:50

Let us look closely at the situation at the beginning. It is clear and needs no stressing that the mission and commission of Christ was to all the world. That means that, whether all the world would believe or not, the appeal was that "ALL should come to a knowledge of the truth". There were few, if any, new facts of an objective kind added to potential witnesses once the resurrection and ascension or glorifying of Christ were established realities. All the essentials of the message were in hand and a full gospel could there and then have been preached. But the Lord commanded them that they should wait. The reason given was until the Holy Spirit should come and they should be empowered for witness. Yes, true, but we may be too superficial as to our apprehension of what that meant. We hurry on with a "power" mentality, and do not look deeply enough to see what it means. The obvious things are taken to be all. Tongues, boldness, convincingness in proclamation, and such like things are regarded as being the chief marks of the Pentecostal baptism. But there was something more than public ministry or verbal testimony with its manifestations bound up with the tarrying issue — the advent of the Holy Spirit.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by ravin, on: 2004/10/31 11:33

I Believe the word is truth and that it is we the body that take offence and what truth we want to hear and run with it. my Bible tells me to put on the whole armor of God. not just what is working for me at the time.
"blessed be the Lord my God who strengthens me and teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight." Psalms 144:1
The words I hear is it's what I believe. Well the devil believes also. "It is written"
So lets put on the whole armor of God.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/10/31 13:32

The Prayer of Christ

Christ had prayed about this witness to the world. The issue involved was the proof that He had been sent from the Father. He knew what the subsequent centuries have proved, that it would not get far with men — the world — to just preach that God sent His Son into the world; stupendous a fact as that was with all its implications. And whatever may be the other and accompanying features of the Holy Spirit's coming upon them, the fact is that, in His prayer, Christ concentrated upon one factor as fundamental to effective witness — the oneness of His own.

The convincingness of testimony, the impact and registration of heavenly truth, the evidence by which reactions would be judged, was — in His heart — behind the things said or how they were said; behind their courage and their ecstasies (which would sooner or later be turned down as fanaticism, psychological, etc.). That background to all else was — with Him — this, "that they may be one". His prayer went deeper and to the very root of all else. It is not good enough to say that He meant something that was a basic, spiritual, and heavenly fact without any manifestation and evidence to the world or concrete earthly expression. We cannot, in all honesty, take refuge from the problem in such construing of His words. No, we have got to face the truth and the present problem and be perfectly honest in our dealing with it. The primary work of the Holy Spirit would be to constitute a "Body", and to MANIFEST its organic oneness. All else would come out of this, and hang upon it. Apart from this all else would fail of fullness, and the measure of life and power, therefore of effectiveness and fruitfulness, would be governed by this oneness. Any injury to this would be a challenge to, and arrest of, life, and a contradiction to an undivided Christ.

When we take the deeper look we see how very true this was in those first months of the church's testimony, and we are not surprised that to arrest or weaken this mighty campaign of victory — to say nothing of bringing reproach upon Christ — the great enemy saw that discord, division, and internal disaffection was the essential strategy. The more he succeeded along this line, so the more difficult became the work, the weaker the testimony, the less the authoritativeness, the more unconvincing the doctrine, the fuller the self-occupation, and so the straitening of resources, and the creeping in of other unspiritual methods and institutions. Men have had to take responsibility for, and bear the burden of, a whole

abric of organisation and its maintenance extra to that for which the Holy Spirit once took custodianship. Questions which arise and must be answered are — Did the Lord only mean a spiritual or “mystical” oneness apart from — so far as the church is concerned — an expression of it? When, at special times the Spirit has given a wonderful and convincing manifestation of this oneness and something akin to the beginning has taken place, many souls saved, all barriers between Christians completely out of sight as though they had never been, is this to be taken as the divine idea for all time, or is it meant to be only in periodic visitations? Is it the heavenly normal or abnormal?

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/1 10:41

Sooner or later such a situation arises, either between two, a local company, a wider body, or in the world at large, where EVERYTHING for any future at all hangs upon a MANIFESTATION of mutual love, SPIRITUAL and expressed unity (not organised union!). Preaching and the “Work” may have to be suspended. Public meetings may have to discontinue. All the external may be driven from public procedure. Persecution and national laws may suppress all forms of organised activity. The very life and continuance of the testimony will then hang upon this one thing, spiritual and practical unity.

Having said that, we are committed to the main business in the present situation of assailing the problem, and here we must summon up all the honesty and courage possible. There never was a matter in the church’s history which called for more honest and courageous facing than this one, for it makes the most stupendous demands; no less are these demands than is the magnitude of the established system which contradicts the Lord’s mind as expressed in His prayer. To proceed to the practical demands of the situation without defining the real basis of unity, and securing an adequate dynamic for action, would be foolish and futile. Therefore we must look at the spiritual foundation as we have it in the New Testament.

We have seen that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon or into the first nucleus of the church, or the church at its beginning, brought about an inward and organic unity and oneness which was more than — and basic to — any outward and objective expressions. The statement that Peter stood up with the eleven is more significant than perhaps we have recognized. It may have been spontaneous and undesigned; or it may have been the custom when preaching, but it at least indicates the dismissal of all reserve on the part of any one, and that they were really moving together in a spontaneous way. It was the impromptu expression of a common and corporate power and principle which had taken up inward residence and control. Given this inwardness of union by “one Spirit”, and fully recognizing that, before all else, they were baptized in one Spirit, and therefore themselves of one Spirit, we have our starting point. There is no hope for Christian unity, and Christ’s prayer cannot find its answer, apart from every Christian being definitely in possession of, and possessed by, the Holy Spirit. The absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit sets aside all other lordship. The meaning of this we have yet to show in our consideration of practical demands, but it will be hopeless unless this inclusive starting point is accepted and experienced. Too much is taken for granted on this matter, and sufficient concern must be felt for unity as to lead to real exercise of heart before the Lord that the Holy Spirit shall really be Lord and produce the fruit of His Lordship. Thus, before all else, Christian unity is the result of a definite and mighty work of the Spirit of God in believers. When this is granted we look to see the first and predominant feature of this unity as manifested at the beginning. Is there one thing that can be seen and recognized as the hallmark of the primal oneness? We think that there is. It was THE GLORY OF THE NAME OF JESUS.

Spontaneously the one expression, unifying passion, concerted action, and characterizing feature was enshrined in “The Name”. Christianity was NOT A NEW TEACHING.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/1 10:53

Not a New Teaching

There is nothing in the whole story upon which to rest an argument or affirmation that the apostles went out to the world with “The teaching of Jesus”. They were not propagating new doctrines or a system of truth. Although they were charged with preaching a “strange doctrine”, they were really only affirming certain facts. To Jews they expounded the Scriptures. The doctrinal parts of the New Testament mainly come out of the acceptance of Christ, and were for the instruction of believers. Ninety percent of the New Testament is for believers. The teaching was a result, not a cause. The most the apostles ever did was to substantiate their testimony from the Scriptures, and affirm certain facts concerning the person of Christ.

Not a New Religion

Christianity was not set over against or alongside of other religions and made “comparative”. It was some time before some of the apostles themselves realised the implications of their testimony in the matter of their being emancipated from Judaism. Great as the change was, they did not realise that they had changed their religion. They found themselves out and committed against their own prejudices, and had to do their thinking and discussing after the thing had become a fact in embarrassing experience. See Peter in the house of Cornelius, and the events of Acts 10, 11, 15, etc.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/1 11:17

Not a New “Movement”

No plans were laid. There was no policy. Pre-organisation was entirely absent, and any which subsequently had to be admitted was forced upon them by the embarrassment of the very vitality of things, and then it was of the simplest, and always spiritual, not merely official.

A thought-out campaign did not exist. To set up, launch, form, bring into being, or found a new society, sect, “church”, community, was not in mind. They did not set out for such, and although their testimony gave distinctiveness to all who believed, and outsiders labelled them and misinterpreted their motive and purpose, the distinguishing feature was life, producing an organism.

All-inclusively it was the proclamation and affirmation of a fact. That fact was — and is — the universal sovereignty and Lordship of Jesus Christ as the Son of God established and vindicated by the resurrection from the dead; and this was all summed up in “The Name”. Everything was “in the Name of Jesus”.

The issue of the first preaching and response thereto was the command to “Repent, and be baptized... in the Name of Jesus”. James seems to indicate that this was the time — i.e. the time of their entering into Christ — when that name was called upon them (James 2:7, margin). This is in keeping with much in both Old and New Testaments as to the church — or House of God — having His name put there. From that point onward there is a very comprehensive range of activities in the Name. Healing, prayer, preaching, agreement, being gathered together, authority over Satan and demons. It was “for the sake of the Name (that) they went forth”. They rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name”.

But with all the activity there was firstly the fundamental unifying bond of the Name, and then the living, working, and having their conduct governed by the honour and glory of the Name. Our point here is that if the passion for the honour of the Name were as it was then there would be no room for other names which divide, whether of people or things, and there would be the most powerful dynamic for dealing with everything contrary thereto, especially division. The question which would decide every issue would be, “Does this glorify the Name of Jesus?” If not, NOTHING must stand in the way of that glory. The Holy Spirit — the Custodian of the Name and its glory — would signalize His good pleasure by doing again what He did then.

Reverting to the prayer of the Lord in John 17 it is important to note that the matter of oneness has two phases. Verse 11: “that they may be one”. Literally it is: “that they may keep on being one”. Verse 23: “that they may be perfected into one” — perfect state as the goal. There is a basic present state of oneness which is to be known, recognized, cherished, diligently preserved, by “all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love”, for “there is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:2,4). This procedure upon the basic oneness will issue in a being “perfected into one”; “till we all attain...” (Eph. 4:13).

It is at this point that all the difficulty and trouble begins. Right here we find the gap in which the whole history of division began and has its occasion. Few will disagree as to the BASIC unity “In Christ”, but few will agree that the MANIFEST unity is as it should be. Between the two there certainly is a big gap with a tragic and grievous history. Argue as we may to justify much of it, if we are spiritually minded and honest we shall have to acknowledge that one thing is responsible for it: that is that DIVISIONS ARE THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY.

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/2 9:57

Spiritual Immaturity

That can be said in different ways: delayed or arrested spiritual growth; a low and weak spiritual condition; a state of spiritual ignorance or unenlightenment; a failure to walk in the Spirit; a living in the "flesh"; a misapprehension, or a limited apprehension of the real nature and meaning of the new birth; a blindness to the real heavenly and spiritual nature of the church; and, inclusively, not seeing the meaning and significance of Christ as in the eternal conception of God and heaven. These are all matters of the most profound and vital importance, and they touch the issue of spiritual oneness in manifestation most positively. While in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians we have the church presented as in completeness, and with regard to its calling, conduct, and conflict; with certain practical features of its life here: when we want to know something about its building we have to visit a locality like Corinth, for there we shall find all the cause of the situation in which the church so largely is in our time, and the principles by which alone that situation can be changed. That divisions, contentions, jealousies, etc. are due to spiritual immaturity, or unduly prolonged spiritual babyhood, is definitely and positively stated there. The whole section of chapters one to four of the first letter to the Corinthians has to do with this; and chapter twelve is its remedy.

But when we have noted all the features of this condition, one thing is shown to be the key to everything — malady and symptoms. That fundamental factor and principle is the mind or mentality of those concerned, and the upshot or issue resolves itself into THE DEMAND FOR A MENTAL REVOLUTION

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/2 10:09

Renewing of the Mind

That mental revolution is what Paul calls "the renewing of the mind". It was the mindedness of the believers in Corinth that resulted in ALL the spiritual arrest and painful disorders. It was Jewish mindedness and Gentile mindedness, i.e. nationalistic (1 Cor. 1:22,23). It was man-mindedness, i.e. the mind of the natural (soulical) man (ch. 3:3,4; ch. 2:14). The natural and carnal mind is continually set over against the spiritual mind in this letter. It is all a matter of the "earthly" man overshadowing the "heavenly" man. It has not yet been sufficiently realised by the Lord's people that the natural mind is the realm in which the evil powers — Satan himself — have the foothold.

In Matthew 16 we have a most startling example. Peter, on affirming Christ to be "the Son of the living God" had been told that "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven". Only a few verses further on Jesus is found addressing the same Peter thus: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." What a crash from heaven to hell! "My Father" — "Heaven" — "Satan" — "Men" — "Flesh and blood". In this Letter to Corinth Paul contrasts the natural man with the spiritual, and the natural and "earthly" with the heavenly (ch. 2 and 15), and says, "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. ("Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.")

Satan is allied to the natural man, and when we live on that basis Satan can do his work of blinding and dividing. But we must remember that Paul was writing to BELIEVERS, which means that believers can live on that "natural" level and therefore give Satan his ground for his evil work. What a large field of spiritual instruction this opens up! But we must come to practical points. It is the entire mentality which is responsible for the state of Christianity today, and evangelical Christianity as much as any other.

Let us be perfectly frank. The present organised system which Christianity has come to be has involved Christians and their leaders in a set of situations which make it — to say the least of it — exceedingly difficult to escape a false, totally false, conception of unity and division. The work of God has become very largely sectional under names, titles, and designations, which represent either doctrine, technique, country, method, or nation. It would not be difficult to arrange "Churches", "Missions" and "Faiths" under such headings, but we refrain. If the reader will do it, the situation becomes obvious. But that is not all. The sections have their own clientele. They must have their own personal and financial support. Funds must be obtained for their maintenance and development. There are many in them as "ministers" and officers whose livelihood hangs upon the increase of the number of "supporters". The piece of work, the church, the undertaking just MUST be supported and kept going. Clientele is a tremendous factor, relating to many other factors.

It is this crystallisation of Christian work into a fixed system, settled, and so generally recognized and accepted, AS TO LEAVE NO PLACE FOR ANY OTHER — any other being at once suspect — that has set up an entirely wrong and per

nicious situation with regard to unity. It is the "church", i.e. the denomination, sect, local congregation, mission, movement, form, order, doctrine (extra to the basic essentials of salvation) which now determine unity or schism. To leave one and go to another, altogether without a consideration for spiritual values is immediately named division, "sheep stealing", etc. We are going to pursue this to its roots, and seek to lay the axe there.

Re: Convincing Evidence - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/4 9:14

Chapter 2 - Persons, Ministries, Functions

In order to deal with the roots of division we must know what and where the roots are. They are only known by their fruits, and are themselves so often unseen or unrecognized. So we must go back to Corinth.

When we look more carefully at that wretched state we find that it resolves itself into divisions over things which really were — and are — meant to constitute a glorious unity, but which things were made evils by the miserable spirit of Christians. That in itself is something to take note of. The Bible is full of paradoxes. Things which are at the same time demanded and forbidden by God, things which are of great use against the devil, being used by the devil against God. It is one of the marks of Satan's triumph at the beginning that grand things have been taken into a realm where they are of evil account and serve the devil's ends. Well, what were these things at Corinth which have grown to such dimensions unto this time?

Persons — Ministries — Functions

These things were persons, ministries and functions "each one of you saith... Paul; and... Apollos; and... Cephas; and... Christ" (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4). "Wherefore let no one glory in men... whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas" (ch. 3:21,22). There was evidently something seriously enough wrong about this personality matter to call forth rebuke and castigation from the apostle. What was the wrong? It is clear from Paul's own admission that these names belonged to men through whom the Corinthians had believed. It would be very natural and unblameworthy if those who owed everything spiritually under Christ to a certain servant of His had a special and very great regard for such a one. Indeed, elsewhere, Paul seemed to use this very fact of his being a spiritual "father" as a ground of appeal for a hearing. So that was not the trouble. The element of human preferences no doubt got near to the cause of rebuke. The preference for a certain kind of man, or his particular ability, style, manner, or matter, has often led to grouping of Christians even in a great convention, and it has not been a far cry to the creating of a group complex from such personalities, nor yet to that forbidden "glorying in man" mentioned above. But when we have said all that can be said regarding such details we have been trivial compared with the great background of it all. We have to remember the great revelation of Jesus Christ which Paul possessed and which governed all his approaches to situations, so that there was nothing trivial or merely "human" or "natural" with him. Paul's mentality was constituted by the one all-overshadowing revelation of the one new-creation Man. While fully recognizing that transformation is a process and conformity to Christ a lifelong business, there were ever present with him — as shown in all his writings — two basic factors: one, that in Christ the old disrupted, divided man is wholly put away and has no place, but a wholly new Man, different and corporate is in being, a new creation in very truth where there CANNOT be anything that belongs to the havoc made in man or the race by the devil. In Christ there cannot be Jew and Greek, etc. (Col. 3:11), and the principle must be carried to many more classifications than Paul mentions, seeing that the divisiveness has worked out to such a much more numerous progeny than existed then. "In Christ" there is "one new man", only one, and utterly new.

The other thing with Paul was that there is a point at which any merely natural or human features must definitely end, and that period should be a VERY brief one indeed. He calls it babyhood, and considers its extension beyond a very short time something grotesque and abnormal. The real trouble therefore was the bringing down of otherwise heavenly things to earthly levels, the level of earthly men: "Are ye not men?" and "...walk after the manner of men" (1 Cor. 3:3,4). Even Christ is taken hold of in this way. It may be that those who said, "I am of Christ" thought that to be a degree above the others, and looked down on them as inferior. But they are classed with the rest in this matter of divisions, for Paul comes back with a sounding slap: "Is Christ divided?" Their use of Christ was after the manner of men to give glory to their spiritual (?) flesh. In his second letter Paul touched this at its core. "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (2 Cor. 5:16). The death-union with Christ just referred to takes this matter of man's place as such back to the very beginning of the Christian life. So then, these divisions are: —

- a. A mark of failure to apprehend the meaning of union with Christ.
- b. Failure to apprehend the significance of Christ Himself.
- c. Failure to emerge from infant conditions.

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/4 10:21

It is all a matter of still moving on the line of the first man, Adam; a pulling everything down to that level. "Are ye not men?" means not humans, but as men in the disintegration of mankind, and not the integration of the "one new man". This is the kind of stuff being put upon the foundation of Christ and its doom is foreshown as going up in the flames and smoke of the final judgment of works. Let it be fully recognized that the "wood, hay and stubble" part of Paul's letter (1 Cor. 3:12) is connected with this whole argument or corrective concerning divisions, and means that to build upon Christ the predilections, preferences, likes, dislikes, natural appraisals, prejudices, partisanships, partialities, etc. of even Christian people is to "be saved: yet so as by fire". This latter solemn warning has usually been used for Gospel purposes, or for "worldly Christians" in a general way, but its use by Paul was specifically related to this matter of disunion by partisanships.

Then we come to the question of ministries. There is every reason to believe that ministry and ministries had a large place in the Corinthian mentality. To read the two letters with this thought uppermost is to be fully convinced of the fact. Indeed, the letters can be said to relate entirely, in the final issue, to the church's ministry. But here again the painful contradiction is found. The very thing that was provided and intended for building was being used for unbuilding; the means for unifying and consolidating was being turned to divide and disintegrate. We shall touch upon only one aspect of this here.

The root weakness and therefore the expressed evil was not only the personal bias, i.e. the bias to persons, but to ministries. There was distinct failure in the matter of recognition of and rejoicing in the value and importance of EVERY form of God-given ministry. The evangelistic bias and preference would reject and criticise the teaching ministry, and probably say, "There is no gospel for the unsaved with him or with them." The teaching bias would take the attitude toward the evangelistic that it was "elementary", "not feeding", etc., and so despise it. Thus you go round the clock to every aspect and emphasis of the whole ministry, and people make ministries the means and ground of divisive groups. This is pernicious in every case! Why do not the Lord's people recognize that what is true of the Body as being one, yet having many members (1 Cor. 12:12), is also true of the ministry; it is one, yet having many aspects. Why say of any, "I (or we) have no need of you"? Then again, is it so inconceivable that the Lord will raise up specific ministries in a corporate way to be complementary to the other things that He is doing? What is the reason for the suspicion and ostracism existing in relation to ministries that the Lord is undoubtedly blessing and using? Let us ask the all-inclusive question regarding this: Is it really, honestly, transparently, and utterly a jealousy that CHRIST shall not lose anything, but rather that He shall have all the increase in spiritual life that is absolutely possible? Is it? Let us test ourselves honestly before God!

If any people in whose spiritual welfare we are interested could really find more of Christ and grow spiritually more fully and quickly in another circle of believers or under another ministry, so that there would be a greater measure of Christ in this world as represented by them, are we willing and happy that they should leave OUR church, mission, group, etc., and go there? Are we really ready for the Lord to deal with ALL that limits Him in us or our connection so that THE DRAW AND THE HOLD IS HIMSELF?

Are we trying to hold up, maintain, and conserve some THING that is not clear, free, open, and adjustable for the ever-growing fullness of Christ? It all amounts to a question of whether the Lord really has sovereignly ordained and determined our ministry. If He has, so long as spiritual principles are not violated, it just must be fulfilled, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; but let us be sure that it is the gates of hell against which we are warring and not the come-back of a false conception and mentality as to what the Lord is after!

Can we not rejoice in ANYTHING that truly ministers Christ, without an inward reservation born of fear as to how it may affect OUR interests? Let us beware of putting OUR hand upon the ark to preserve it intact. The Lord will only confound us if we do.

When we come to functions, we are only coming to an extension of ministry. While the SPECIFIC ministries are represented by the specific function (not offices) of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, the whole Body is bro

ught into view as a ministering Body. Every member is an organ and therefore has a function. Interrelatedness and interdependence are the laws of its ministry, and a vast diversity is in an equally vast unity known as "the unity of the Spirit" or "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit". Thus, the apostle gives much prominence to this great spiritual truth in relation to the impact of the church upon the world, just as did the Lord in John 17. All the strong things said by the apostle about "not discerning the Lord's body", and "destroying the temple of God", etc., are seen to have a corporate aspect, and therefore involve the church in the question of its world-testimony and impact. We just cannot say to any real member of Christ, "We can do without you." Perhaps we would not SAY that, but do we act that? Is ours a negative or a positive attitude? Surely what Paul meant was "We just cannot do without you!" "We must have you!" The need is not to maintain some earthly thing with a Christian title, but for the expression of Christ and His increase.

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/5 10:05

Chapter 3 - "That the World may Believe"

We have said that Christianity as it now is has set up an entirely false basis — an impossible basis — of Christian unity, and divisions among Christians are viewed and judged from a standpoint which is utterly wrong. That standpoint is the one that views the whole question in the light of the system which Christianity has become. It is no longer the all-dominating EXPERIENCE of the absolute sovereign headship of Christ over a living spiritual organism, His church; but it is now a matter of churches, missions, movements, enterprises, organizations, with their respective memberships, clientele, officers, funds, etc. It is very largely what in the world is termed "vested interests", in localities, countries, areas, personalities, personal interests, proprietorships, and so on and on. The supreme concern for the SPIRITUAL measure of Christ is governed by all this, instead of governing it or making it completely subservient, if not unnecessary. Realism and honesty demand that we face facts and do not deceive ourselves with false hopes and expectations.

An expression of Christian unity in any adequate way is absolutely impossible while the present position obtains!

We have got to start all over again. Until we do, the mission and testimony of the church is going to be increasingly sabotaged by suspicions, prejudices, ostracisms, and factions. This smoke from hell will stifle and paralyse, and bring increasing limitation, so that Christianity — yes, evangelical Christianity — paralyzes itself. The disagreements on points of doctrine, interpretation, the taking up of one point and enlarging it to eclipse ninety-nine other wholly acceptable points on the one hand, and the wearing of blinkers regarding many unscriptural things to get benefits from a small proportion of what is good, on the other hand, is a case of putting the hand upon the ark by those who have no spiritual rights for governing the Lord's interests, and by their limited spirituality are both standing in the Lord's way, and ministering to this enemy-action to fill the air with questions as to "soundness" and "safety".

We have said above that a new beginning is the only way to an adequate expression of unity. WHAT is that beginning, and WHERE is it to take place? This is a much happier line of enquiry and presentation than that wallowing in the morass of the facts, causes and nature of divisions.

Re: - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/11/8 9:59

The Starting Place and Basis of Unity is the Cross

Is it the dark shadow of legalism threatening to strangle, or actually strangling, the life of the church as in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians? Then see how the Spirit of life leads the apostle to bring the cross into full view as the only but sure means of deliverance!

Is it the many-sided carnality, the reasserting of the natural man, even unto the realm of the spirituals as at Corinth? Again, see how "Christ crucified" is the EXCLUSIVE remedy!

Is it petty jealousies and standing for rights as at Philippi? Then see the humbling of Himself by Christ, and "obedience unto death, yea, the death of the cross" which is presented as the example for victory! So it ever is: a vital union, a union with Christ in His death which has also become a critical experience in believers, in "ministers", in "workers", and in "the work", is the one and only ground and way to an expression of unity.

We shall have to die, not only to the world and to ourselves, but to our work, our denomination, our mission, our enterprise or our movement, AS SUCH, and in all have only one object which obliterates all other interests and consciousness; that is Christ, His increase and fullness! The "I" of Galatians 2:20, which is supposed to be crucified with Christ, covers a much larger area than a merely legal death, or the legal aspect of Christ's death. It touches the whole matter of religious and traditional relationships, as the context shows. Paul was really saying that the "no longer I" meant his death to the Law and its ordinances, which meant Judaism as a system which had been transcended by Christ. The Cross not only makes Christ superior to "Christianity" (as we know it) but completely subjugates it to Him.

The church — according to Paul's statements — is no combination of nations or nationals, or classes, or denominations; it is not "inter" in any respect, it is "uni"; it annihilates ALL, and brings up "ONE NEW Man", only one, and entirely new — as Christ is the FIRST of a "new creation".

This has to find its very beginning in a new consciousness of a new-born child. Not this-or-that-conscious, but Christ-conscious, and "all one in Christ" CONSCIOUS, not mere doctrine or slogan. Until this ground is really taken or occupied, and Christ-consciousness just does transcend our religious connection or tradition-consciousness, there will remain inner and outer divisions.

The Cross is a mighty power, and it has to be applied right at the root of our being and of our system of things.

The question is as to whether our measure of Christ is really so much bigger than our particular Christianity-complex that the latter fails to affect us in our attitude toward Christ's own, just because they are His. This is the only way of manifested unity.

T.A. Sparks