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The Unity of the Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, July 1927, Vol. 5-7.

Republished in Jan-Feb 1954, Vol. 32-1.

"Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Ephesians 4:3.

This unity is that which is resultant from the indwelling and dominating control of the Holy Spirit.

The illustration is that of the head and the body. Every limb or member, every faculty of the body is controlled by the nervous system, and this nervous system works from and to the head where it has its base.

In the Body of Christ the Holy Spirit is the great nervous system, and only as there is an immediate response to every intimation of the will of the Head, and the life unbrokenly in correspondence with His mind, can there be an expression of the unity of which the New Testament speaks.

Three things must be clearly noticed.

1. We cannot "keep" what does not exist. The admonition presupposes our having received the Holy Spirit into our lives in a vital way and having surrendered ourselves entirely to His control and direction.
2. We cannot create this unity. It is essentially spiritual. Creeds, organizations, the social spirit, compromise on matters of interpretation and practice can never achieve it.

3. There is the paradox of unity. "Peace" in the scriptures means harmony. But while Christ is called "the Prince of peace" and while that harmony has been created in many lives and spheres where He has been enthroned, He clearly said that one result of His coming would be not peace but a sword.

It is clear that wherever His Cross has been fully presented, there has been trouble and upheaval. All the things against which His Cross stands have at once created a state of war. The world, the flesh, in all their forms and expressions, make spiritual unity impossible; and in so far as even Christians are influenced in their judgments, their standards of reckoning, their conceptions, as well as in their motives, methods and means, by the world-spirit or the Adam nature, these things likewise make spiritual oneness impossible.

The fuller the presentation of the Cross, the greater the arousing of the elements of the fallen nature and therefore - on the one hand, the greater peril and possibility of discord, and, on the other hand, the call for a more complete capitulation to the life of the Spirit as against the life in the flesh.

This work of separating will be carried out in ourselves personally, in our homes, in our local churches, and in Christendom at large.

On this basis of flesh and spirit the "house divided against itself" will fall.

True unity has its birth at Calvary, where the world and the flesh - with the Devil working through both to maintain his discord in the universe - were dealt with and forever ruled out of the new creation.

This unity which Calvary creates calls for our diligence for its maintenance.

Certain things might well be borne in mind:

(1) The Holy Spirit is of one mind, and never leads in two ways which contradict each other in principle.

(2) The Holy Spirit is unchanging in truth. With Him there is no variableness from time to time.

(3) Differences of degree should never be a ground of division. The different ages and degrees of maturity in our family need never throw the family into schism.

(4) Basic contradictions or inconsistencies will ever result in arrested fellowship, and be fruitful ground for the satanic sower of seeds of discord.

(5) We must never act on a principle of expediency, policy, or prejudice, in order to try to advance the Lord's interests and safeguard the truth. It is better to have a more limited sphere of usefulness - as men regard it - than to keep doors open by compromise. This, at length, brings a breach with the faithful.

(6) Spiritual oneness is "in Christ," not in ourselves. The ascendancy of Christ over self is the only way to this oneness.

(7) Let it be ever recognised that in the Lord's spiritual house there are His order and appointments. To be out of our place, to assume a position or ministry which is not ours, to interfere with others who are the "Lord's anointed", to mentally ignore, despise, or set aside such, to be negligent of our own ministry, or in any other way to disturb the Divine order is to upset "the unity of the Spirit", and to throw the Body into a disturbed and conflicting state.

There are many things to be discerned in our "giving diligence to keep the unity", but if the Cross has been truly applied to our own life, and we are really walking after the Spirit, we shall know within ourselves what these things are.