



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume 24
Issue 577

The Spirit's Unity

Part 1

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

I am entreating you, then, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit with the tie of peace: one body and one spirit, according as you were called also with one expectation of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:1-6, CV).

Beginning with God in His inmost secret affections, conceived before creation, we trace our relationship to Christ, as His members, and consider the mutual relationships of His saints. We will consider the present practical effect of these marvelous unfoldings.

GOD'S NOBILITY

What we believe of God, and of Christ and of the saints, to the saints, and to Christ, and to God must be lived. Who can "walk worthily" (:1) of a calling which he does not apprehend? Let us not strive to be what we are not. All God asks of us is to live up to what He has made us. The preparation for such a walk, the power for such deportment, lies in a consciousness of our high social standing among God's nobility.

Among men we readily recognize a nobleman by the superficial niceties of his conduct. We ought to be the true nobility, known by the deeper and more enduring virtues which adorn the doctrine we profess.



HUMILITY IS THE PRIME GRACE

The rarest and most precious gem found in the field of human conduct is true humility. In these days it is derided and condemned. It is considered a weakness, if not a disease. Aggressive self-assertion seems necessary for preferment. How far have we fallen from the great ideal! How little do we see of that genuine meekness which springs from a profound realization of the truth!

MANIFESTING PATIENCE IN LOVE

Patience is the rare and precious virtue which follows humility and meekness. We are to bear with one another in love (:2). All of this is based upon the unfathomable affection which God lavishes upon us and on all who are His. We cannot respond to His love without, at the same time, including those who are embraced by it. We can manifest it best in practice, by a becoming conduct toward His saints.

When the apostle first gives us a glimpse of the transcendent path which we now tread, he sums it all ►



up in one word: **LOVE** (I Corinthians 12:31-14:1). He begins his eulogy by saying “*Love is patient*” and he ends by affirming that it *endures all* (:4, 7). This is the greatest of the abiding trinity – faith, expectancy, love – and love shall never lapse (:8).

THE TRUE FOUNDATION FOR PEACE

Now we have the foundation for peace. The warring factions of Christendom are seeking peace by compromise. *Real peace between God’s saints is based on humility and meekness, patience and forbearance, and recognition of the spirit’s unity.* Apart from this there can be no real reconciliation. The peace and unification which is proposed today is based largely on indifference to the vital values of God’s revelation. It is human in its method and its object.

UNITY IS NOT UNIFORMITY

We can really unite with all who are hallowed only by ignoring the sects and parties and schisms to which they belong. Let us have fellowship with all, irrespective of their church affiliations. Do they belong to the Body of Christ? Then they belong to us, and we to them.

The days in which we are living are days of dissension and discord and division. There is a continual and persistent effort for unity, but it seldom bears any fruit but schism. *One of the saddest features is the fact that truth itself is made an excuse for further division.* Every “movement” rapidly degenerates into a sect. So fertile are the seeds of schism that it is only a short time until the division itself is divided into dozens of fragments.

The only *human* method of arresting this disintegration is to set up some human head, such as the pope of Rome, or the bishops and councils of the Western churches. There must be some human authority. Leaders find that they cannot keep their followers together unless they assume jurisdiction over their faith and decide for them just what they must believe.

A very practical and searching question arises at this point. We have learned some great and precious truths, notably the reconciliation of the universe. Shall we allow this truth to separate between us and

our fellow believers? Shall we let it be the nucleus of a sect? Shall we confine our fellowship to those who see as we do on this important point? Shall it create a division; another breach in the unity which God intends shall characterize His saints in this economy?

That this is its natural tendency no one will deny. No one can help having more intimate fellowship with those of like faith than with those who are otherwise minded. To human wisdom a strong separate organization would be the surest method of promoting a successful propaganda. The answer to all these questions is found in the opening entreaty of the Ephesian epistle. There we already have a unity – the unity of the spirit. We are not called upon to *make* this unity but to *keep* it. This is most vital.

ENDEAVOR MUST BE MADE TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

All efforts toward Christian unity today are like the patching together of broken fragments. They are all directed toward restoring the outward semblance. The true unity is a *spiritual* one and *still exists* in spite of all the apparent divisions. *All that is needed is to recognize this unity* and ignore the other so-called unities and alliances and associations which are trying to create a superficial communion, but which are really the greatest hindrances to the display of the God-made unity which embraces all His own.

The unity which we are to keep with diligence is based upon seven fundamental truths. Its keyword is *one*. There is *one* Body – and *only one* – *one* spirit, *one* expectation, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father. The apostle is not revealing to the Ephesians that there *is* a God, or that there *is* a body. He is insisting that there is *only one*. The church of today repudiates every one of these divine unities.

When we read of “the Protestant bodies,” or “the Methodist body,” what is it but a denial that there is *one* Body? However, is it not still sadder to hear of those who meet “on the ground of the one Body” yet exclude all who do not meet upon this ground?

The Body of Christ is no organization of our manufacture. It is an organism whose members are placed in the Body as it pleases *Him*. It has but one Head,

even Christ. It is our duty and privilege first of all to acknowledge His headship and, in doing this, we must also recognize every member that He has. We are all members of the same Body. We are not divided. We are one.

The lack of unity among God's saints is a source of the utmost shame and confusion to those who seek to please Him. To mourn over the many organizations which have marred the manifestation of this unity to the world is the constant exercise of all who know the truth. Not only are the castes of Israel revived, so that we have clergy and laity, but we have a hundred sects for every one of theirs. There is only one Body in Christ, but there may be a thousand in the world. There is but one faith, but creeds are numberless. There is only one Lord, but how diverse are the disciplines which have replaced Him!

Many attempts have been made "to get back to the ground of the one Body," but each has resulted in another organization, another division. Every effort made to unify God's people seems to be but another means of further schism. A new truth is proclaimed. Some believe. Some do not. One faction leaves, and there is another "body." Unbelief creeps in, and such a movement as "Modernism" invades a congregation or a pulpit. Those who wish to be faithful revolt, and there is still another "body." The tragic truth is that it is indifference and compromise which are tending to organize Christianity into one great dead "body," and it is the sincere and faithful spirits (who ought to preserve the unity of the spirit) who are continually causing further disintegration.

What are we to do? We cannot compromise nor do we dare divide.

The difficulty is that men are making their own unity while ignoring the unity of the spirit. The moment we *make* it we are sure to *break* it. It does not need making. It needs taking. *Negatively*, all that is necessary is to ignore all other unities, however fair they seem, however godly the saints that they include, however indispensable they appear. *Positively*, let us acknowledge all who are sealed by the spirit, all who know God and are members of the Body of Christ. Let us acknowledge only *one* Body, *one* spirit, *one* expectation, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God.

THE BODY IS ONE AND INDIVISIBLE

Unity is one of the controlling thoughts of Ephesians. It is not confined to this exhortation. Each item of the secret consists in joining together those who have been far apart. Physical distinctions are all repealed. The distressing divisions of the past are done away. One of the principal aims of all our lives should be the preservation of the oneness which actually exists between us and all the other saints of this era. Let us resist every effort to divide and sunder what God has joined together.

In Israel, apart from the various sects, there were several "bodies" of divine appointment. The anointing oil was confined to a privileged class of men, the priesthood. They formed a distinct body, separated from the Levites, their brethren, and the rest of Israel. The priests were, in a special manner, God's christians, or anointed ones, in Israel. They had the oil, a sign of the spirit.

All, in this economy, have the anointing of the spirit itself, and all today have access into the very presence of the Father. No one in the Body of Christ is like a common Levite, or a mere Israelite of another tribe.

There were at least three distinct bodies in Israel, determined by their distance from the deity. Outside of these there were distinct "bodies" even among the nations. There were the proselytes, and others who believed, making two or three "bodies" among the gentiles, though each had few privileges of any kind.

In contrast with these there is only *one* body today. It is a joint body in which all the members are of equal rank. Not only are the Circumcision, priests, Levites, and others, on the same level, but the proselytes and devout believers among the nations are not distinguished from one another or from the three bodies in Israel. The most uncouth and unlearned saint in far off Thessalonica ranked just the same as Barnabas, the Levite, in the Body of Christ. There is no temple curtain, barring out the priests, no holy place into which the Levites cannot come, no court to which an Israelite has no access, no wall to shut out the nations, no ceremonies to mark off the proselytes from inferior ranks of gentile believers. All are ►

one body, for all are in Christ, so near and dear to God that distinctions are impossible.

Let us insist that the characteristic truth for today is not merely that we are the Body of Christ, but that this is a *joint-body*, and there is *only one*. There are differences between saints. There are degrees of knowledge or ignorance. There is variety in service, and in the rewards to which it leads. However, let us remember that we are not in the Body of the *Lord*, but in the Body of *Christ*. Attainment and service are not necessary to membership. The most ignorant saint is entitled to a place in the joint-body. No service whatever is needed to become a member. Faith alone is all that is required. Only thus can there be but *one* Body.

Christendom today has many organizations. Yet in all of these, and outside of them as well, are those who are living members of that one great spiritual organism whose Head is Christ. Its membership is based solely on the possession of God's spirit, not on any man-made bonds whatever. God alone can put men in it, and no one can put men out of it. It is divine. It is the work of God's spirit.

Let us recognize His handiwork and acknowledge His achievement. Many a saint is awed by the religious atmosphere of some great cathedral, but does not realize the solemn sanctity of God's real dwelling place, the ecclesia of Christ. It alone is hallowed. Let us make much of it.

ONE SPIRIT

We have so long been accustomed to reading "spirit" with a capital "S" and referring it to God's spirit exclusively that, to many, the small "s" seems offensive and derogatory. However, the word spirit is by no means confined to God's holy spirit. It would be trite indeed to insist that God's spirit is only one. We have a spirit. Each act of our lives is characterized by a spirit. Each administration has its own peculiar spirit. The spirit of the Mosaic economy was legal. It has no place today. When the disciples desired to draw down fire upon their enemies they were told that they did not know what spirit pertained to them. The spirit of Elijah's ministry was quite different from that of our Lord's, though both were actuated by the same holy spirit.

The "spirit" speaks of the temper of the mind, the key to which life's activities are pitched. In every divine administration this is dependent on God's assumption and the nature of the work which engages Him. Elijah's attitude toward his enemies could not be duplicated by our Lord. Neither can we duplicate the spirit of our Master's day. Gentiles were treated as outsiders, deserving almost no consideration. The same spirit was not shown them which obtained in the churches in Israel. Only when a Jew was obstinate and would not bow to the decision of the congregation, then he also was to be treated like a man of another nation. Today no such distinctions may be maintained. Jews and gentiles are on one common ground, and this a spiritual one. We deal with one another on the one high plateau of His exalted favor.

What Is Truth? Absolute and Relative

by — Don Bast

High above the storm clouds the sun is always shining. When we get a glimpse of God's perspective we are able to experience the Son of His love shining through the darkest storms of life.

Dean Hough of the Concordant Publishing Concern and the Saviour of All Fellowship writes to Don concerning his book:

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"Your book is full of important truth and a good aid to understanding Scripture."

Those of the Circumcision who died in their faith never entered into this truth. Peter wrote to the dispersion telling them to behave themselves ideally “*among the nations*” (I Peter 2:12) where they found themselves. This is not an isolated statement, but one of many which show the double spirit which he and the surviving Circumcisionists showed to the end of their days.

Nowhere in his letters, or, indeed, in any epistles except Paul’s latest, does the truth of the one spirit receive acknowledgment.

Christendom has almost utterly missed the spirit which should distinguish it from all previous administrations. It has lived in the atmosphere of Sinai or Jerusalem instead of in the prison house of Paul at Rome. In the bondage of the law, or seeking to fit into the earthly kingdom, it has imbibed and manifested a spirit foreign to the truth. It should display such boundless grace and love, in accord with God’s own attitude, that all men everywhere would recognize its every act by its delicious Christ-like spirit. Instead, it has become the opposite, and is described by God Himself as an unearthly monster, more ferocious than the beasts of the earth.

ONE EXPECTATION

If our place were in that kingdom and we hoped to enter it alive, our future outlook would be one of terror and dread. At any moment the portals of Jehovah’s day might open and we would enter its terrible trials and suffer its terrific tribulations. Only those who endure to the end will be delivered.

Israel’s expectation in the kingdom finds no fulfillment until *after* the time of tribulation. Hence Paul gave a prior expectancy: the celestial allotment of Ephesians (1:12).

Unlike the kingdom expectations, our outlook is the same for all. All will have a celestial allotment, all will be with Christ, all will go at the same time. There is only *one* expectation!

This is the fruit of grace transcendent. It ignores the distinctions of flesh and makes favorites of all. In the kingdom almost all the promises and privileges are

for Israel. The nations have no expectation worthy of the name. If the gentiles of this era were to be with them in the kingdom we would soon discover that there was more than one expectation. Our outlook would not compare with that of a Jew, no matter what our spiritual attainments might be.

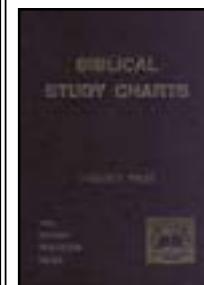
This gracious truth is being assailed from all sides. It does not seem possible to leave grace unadulterated. There is one, and only one, expectation common to all the saints of this most gracious economy.

ONE LORD

There is one Master, or Lord. How this strikes at the very root of the ecclesiasticism of today! With the Ephesians the contrast would consist in the repeal of the decrees issued from Jerusalem, which were the token of their subjection to the twelve.

Now decrees are issued, not only from Jerusalem, but from Rome, from London and Berlin, and from a thousand councils and conferences and synods, and so voluminous as to fill whole books with rules for the discipline of the saints. At the very same time the inspired exhortations of the *Prison Epistles*, which are the real rule of conduct for today, are forgotten or ignored.

(*to be continued*)



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by — Charles Welch (1880-1967)

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This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 1:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - union in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

We do not claim infallibility for the contents of this publication. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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ABBREVIATION KEY

Scripture Version

(Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Bible Student's Version*).
CV: Concordant Literal Version
DAR: Darby Translation
DT: Dabhar Translation
FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible
KJV: King James Version
RE: Rotterdam's Emphasized Bible

WT: Weymouth Translation
YLT: Young's Literal Translation
Reference Sources

AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)
BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon
CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)
CC: Concordant Commentary (Knoch)
CKC: Concordant Keyword
Reference Notations
c.f. – compare
e.g. – for example
et al. – and others
etc. – et cetera (and so on)
ff. – and the following
i.e. – that is

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