

“The Unity Of The Spirit”

“... giving diligence to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). This appeal to the Ephesians followed Paul’s urge that they *“walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love ...”* (vss. 1-2). By observing the aforementioned things, the Ephesians would *“walk worthily of their calling”* and also would be giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace!

Unity in doctrine does not always signify unity of spirit. The fusing together of two hostile segments of society, Jew and Gentile, was not always accomplished peacefully. Even when men are of the same race but exposed to different cultures (such as Hebrew and Grecian Jews), differences arise; i.e., the problem in Acts 6 where the widows of Grecian Jews were neglected *“in the daily ministrations.”* Amos’ question, *“Can two walk together except they have agreed?”* is certainly true whether it be that agreement is upon doctrine or non-doctrinal matters (Amos 3:3).

Disputes often arise. The herdsmen of Lot and Abraham quarrel over pastures (Gen. 13:6-8). Barnabas and Paul quarreled over Mark (Acts 15:37-40). The disciples of Jesus quarreled about which of them was the greatest on the very eve of Jesus’ betrayal (Lk. 22:24). It took the lowly task of Jesus washing their feet to shock them back into proper sense of who really is great (Jn. 13:3-11). And the list which brethren, and congregations, quarrel about is endless. Often separations come and one or the other will intimate that separation was *“doctrinal,”* thereby offering justification for separation. But often the issue was not really doctrine, just a case where brethren had differences in judgment, over likes or dislikes. Separations are not always wrong: Abraham suggested separation to Lot to prevent even more conflict in the future which was sure to come as their herds and flocks increased. But the separation appeared amiable: even after it, Abraham rushed to the aid of Lot to rescue him from marauders who took Lot and others of Sodom captive (Gen. 14:11-24). When the stench of wickedness in Sodom became so great that God determined to destroy it and Gomorrah and revealed those plans to Abraham; the passionate plea of Abraham for Sodom’s preservation was no doubt rooted in his care for Lot. Our care for brethren and the welfare of other congregations should be real and earnest. Paul wrote, *“Now, if Timothy come, see that he be with you without fear, for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do”* (1 Cor. 16:10). The prosperity of other brethren are not for themselves but for the cause of Christ, whom both they and we serve. Therefore, rejoice when other brethren prosper, even though we may not -- visibly.

Within a local church, if the unity of the spirit prevails, it will be when brethren walk with lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering toward each other: when they have reached the position they have because all have determined *"to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."* Oh, how difficult it sometimes is to yield to the desires of others, especially when we are certain (and which circumstances later prove) we are right! Oh, how hard to remember Christ's rule: *"As ye would therefore that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them"* (Mt. 7:12). Only when every disciple of Christ has this spirit, will peace prevail. Alas, not all have this disposition of heart!

The Psalmist wrote, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"* (Ps. 133:1). Jesus said, *"every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself shall fall"* (Mt. 12:25). We have a formidable foe who seeks our destruction. We need all our efforts to be directed against him, not against each other! Thus we are urged, *"Be at peace among yourselves."*

Jim McDonald