

WHAT IS  
"Endeavouring to Keep  
the  
Unity of the Spirit."



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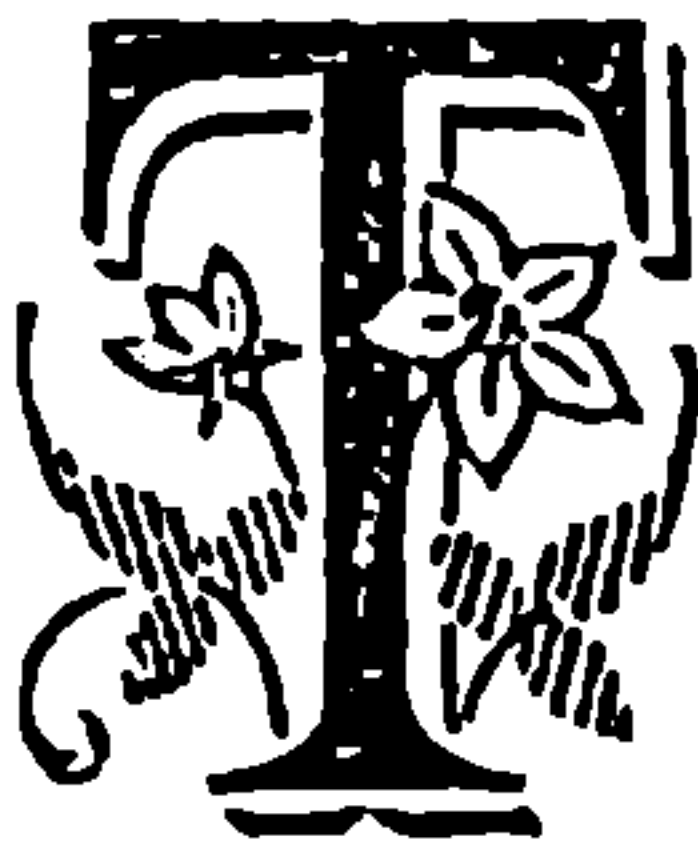
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## What is "Endeavouring to Keep the Unity of the Spirit"?

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 THE question naturally arises, *What* is the "unity of the Spirit" we are exhorted to keep? Surely God has not told us to use diligence to keep a unity, respecting the nature and extent of which He has given us no instruction. This cannot be; what the unity embraces must be in the word of God, though it may not lie on the surface.

May we not gather instruction on the subject from the nature and

scope of the scriptures themselves ? When we remember that they were written at different times extending over some two thousand years ; written by persons whose status was very different—some learned, and some unlettered (Acts iv. 13) ; written in different styles, and embracing a great variety of subjects ; yet there is not throughout a single clash, nor two parts in the least disjointed. The whole forms one beautiful and perfect whole, evincing in the clearest manner *the unity of the Spirit*. “ For holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” “ All scripture is given by inspiration of God ;” and “ No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”

It thus all forms one beautiful exhibit of the unity of that Spirit; nothing from the holy men themselves being allowed to come in and mar that unity. The men wrote, but the Holy Ghost guided.

Now will not this help us to answer the question as to what is the unity of the Spirit we are exhorted to keep?

It is clear that if "by one Spirit we are all baptised into one body," we must own every one thus united as being a part of that body, or we shall not "keep" the unity. The unity of the body we cannot break; but we may the unity of the Spirit which has formed that body. This would be the case if we held that there were many bodies, or more

than one, when God says there is but *one*.

Another step leads us to the Lord's supper: “we, being many, are one bread.” If we break bread as a separate body, we are not endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit; for God says we being many are *one* loaf, *one* body.

If we look into the New Testament it is easy to find examples where the unity was broken, examples which are full of instruction. For instance, the assembly at Corinth was maintaining in their midst a wicked person. Was this keeping the unity of the Spirit? Surely not. Paul demanded that the man should be put out, and we know that Paul was right; so that it is



clear that the assembly at Corinth was not, for a time, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit, or they would have had the same judgment as Paul, and have acted thereon.

We see here that the unity of the Spirit may at times be maintained only by cutting off a wicked person. And we gather further instruction on this point by the directions given to the elect lady in 2 John, where she is told not to receive one into her house, nor to wish him God-speed, if he did not bring the doctrine of Christ.

In the first of these cases we see *holiness* is demanded ; in the second *truth* is demanded. And these exactly agree with the character of

the blessed Spirit. He is the *Holy* Spirit, and the Spirit is *truth*. (1 John v. 6.)

Now if these illustrations point out, in some respects at least, the nature of the unity, the question returns: To what extent is this carried? or over what sphere should this unity be looked for?

This leads us to other things named in scripture. For instance, we are to be of the same *mind* one toward another (Rom. xii. 16); we are to be joined together in the same *judgment* (1 Cor. i. 10); we are all to *speak* the same thing (1 Cor. i. 10); and to *walk* by the same rule, *mind* the same things. (Phil. iii. 16.) Now, how is all this



possible, when we remember how different our minds and tendencies are *as men*, except by the fact that we are all indwelt by the one self-same Spirit, who can accomplish in us all this ?

We get a beautiful intimation of this unity in Philippians iii. 15. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded ; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

There is no room for the thought that a difference of mind was to continue. The apostle had the fullest confidence that God would teach others what He had taught him. At times *we* may not be sure that something we have learnt is of

God, and therefore we should be glad to know if it commends itself to other godly persons, who are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If He has taught it to one, will He not teach it to others also ?

But let it be noted that this wonderful *sameness* does not bring all down to one dead level. The apostle Peter found in Paul's writings “things hard to be understood,” but this did not create a breach of the unity. A difficulty is not a disagreement. With grace reigning in our hearts there will be no breach of the unity of the Spirit, though some are much more advanced than others ; and these latter should also be desirous of being taught.

There *was* a breach of the unity exemplified in the history of these same two apostles, when Peter with others "dissembled," and Paul had to withstand him to the face, because he was to be blamed. (Gal. ii. 11.) This was not simply because Paul was in advance of Peter, but because the latter dissembled.

It might have seemed a very small thing to Peter to eat with the Gentiles, and then refuse to do so when some came from James—being all things to all men in a *bad* sense; but it was not a small thing to break the unity of the Spirit; and the rebuke was not only administered, but it has been handed down to us for our instruction.

In the family of God there are

babes, young men, and fathers ; but there is nothing in these differences of growth to make a breach of the unity.

There are also different lines of service—evangelists, pastors, and teachers—wherein each has his own work to do, but all leading to one and the same end—“for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we *all come in the unity of the faith*, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. iv. 12, 13.)

There are also different parts of the body, each with his own appointed work, but all made to

maintain the unity of the Spirit. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." (1 Cor. xii. 4-6.) Mark how the sameness is here enforced: it is the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God. These may all have been in operation in producing the holy scriptures, and yet, as we have seen, there is the most perfect harmony in the whole. Will there not in like manner be the same harmony in all the operations of the whole body of Christ, where there is the diligence to maintain the unity of the Spirit? Indeed, this



passage proves that where it is God who is working there must be harmony. How sensitive, then, we should be that when there is not harmony, there must be something *of man* somewhere ; and how slow we ought to be to press our judgment when it does not commend itself to godly Christians. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit is linked with “ the bond of peace.”

Does not the passage itself shew that the “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit” (which, indeed, is only part of a sentence) should not be confined simply to the question of reception at the Lord’s Table. Its context exhorts us :

To *walk* worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called ;



To do this with all meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another *in love* ;

Using diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting *bond of peace*.

There is one Body and one Spirit, as ye have been also called in *one hope* of your calling.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and *in you all*.

The unity of the Spirit then embraces everything in the sphere wherein the Holy Spirit acts, both in the individual Christian—"one toward another"—extending from his "thoughts" to his "walk ;" and in the whole body of Christ in all

that pertains to the same. Using diligence to maintain this unity will surely redound to the glory of God, and to the welfare of the saints, while it will also strengthen the “bond of peace.”



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