

THE DIVINE WAY OF UNITY IN CHRISTIANITY.

WE may truly say that the desire for unity is inherent in every one who is born of God. The fact that the same spiritual affections are implanted in each one by the one Spirit indwelling each one, and that each one is in the one Christ, and the one Christ in each one, in oneness of relationship to the Father in the Son, renders it impossible for any of God's family to be altogether indifferent to the thought of unity. The lack of unity in God's beloved people has ever been, and continues to be, a matter of constant regret and even grief with every true believer in whose heart the love of God has been shed abroad.

This distress of heart and mind over the sad dissensions of Christians has again and again stirred devoted godly men with various suggestions and most earnest efforts in view of unity amongst God's people. In most cases the remedy has proved worse than the disease, and so division has continued to increase and abound notwithstanding all.

We may be sure that no human way, however sincerely intended, or devotedly promoted, will be allowed to keep God's people together, neither will

zeal in service or knowledge of scripture, however devoted or correct, prevent disagreement. A way is needed which is at once compatible with thorough oneness of mind and judgment, and, at the same time, with liberty and diversity of thought and action.

Now organisation and system of whatever degree or kind must in measure sacrifice liberty and diversity, whilst individuality without Divine supply and control must sacrifice oneness and unity with others. Neither the official nor the radical have any place in the Divine way of unity.

The Divine way of unity in Christianity may be considered in a fourfold aspect :—

- I. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN SERVICE AGAINST THE TENDENCY TO BE SELFISHLY DEMANDING FROM, OR DOMINATING OVER, OTHERS.
- II. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN AFFECTION AGAINST THE SUBTLE ENSNARING INFLUENCES OF THIS WORLD, OR THIS PRESENT COURSE OF THINGS.
- III. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT AGAINST THE EFFECT OF OUR NATURAL DIVERSITY.
- IV. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN THE UNITY OF THE FAITH AGAINST THE TENDENCY TO INDEPENDENT SYSTEMATIZED TEACHING OR THEOLOGY.

I. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN SERVICE AGAINST THE TENDENCY TO BE SELFISHLY DEMANDING FROM, OR DOMINATING OVER, OTHERS.

It will of course be understood that we are addressing ourselves to those who have received the Gospel, and are under Divine teaching. Such at the beginning are in the freshness of first love and gratitude for grace shewn, and are naturally most desirous to serve. Indeed it would be, in a kind of way, almost unnatural if, after receiving so much benefit, we had no desire to do anything and everything in our power for the One who has done so much for us.

We therefore think that our first point as to the maintenance of unity in service is most forcibly illustrated in the well-known and most instructive account of Martha and Mary at the end of Luke x. In the moral order of Luke's teaching the gratitude for the full and marvellous ministry of grace by the Samaritan (see chap. x.) naturally expresses itself in zeal to serve such a bountiful Giver. Neither do we for one moment suppose that the Giver of such abundant grace could ever check or damp one single desire to serve Him. Indeed we believe the Lord intends each one who is the subject of His grace to do something for Him. We do not, therefore, wish to throw the slightest chill on any true love to the Lord flowing from the sense of benefits received, but we do wish to guard and guide by calling attention to what is here so em-

phatically said to be the one thing necessary in order to serve unselfishly.

It might of course be very readily concluded that a soul overflowing with a grateful sense of Divine goodness, evidenced in benefits received, is quite competent to serve. This is quite a natural conclusion; and here many young converts, ardent in their new-found joy, and encouraged, ye urged, by those who know no better way, have been taken advantage of by the subtle self-working of the flesh, which can freely work as prompted by benefits received, rather than by the blessed Giver of those benefits.

Now the proper effect of all benefit is to bring everyone to the feet of the One who has bestowed the benefit, because we not only require supply on the side of our weakness and need, but, for service, we require the supply of what He is in Himself, some little unfolding of Himself to us, that self may be displaced by being filled with Himself. This is surely much more than gratitude for what has been done for us and given to us, however great and blessed that may be.

The little that Christ has shewn anyone of Himself (as He only can speak it to any soul), is the whole of that one's material for service, whatever his gift, or the particular form his service may take. Nothing is real genuine service which flows from even a grateful self, or into which any form of self enters, however much the Lord may be pleased to make use of it, or accomplish by it. We may therefore

easily see the force of the Lord's statement to Martha, "There is need of one thing," in contrast with the many things engaging her. What an exclusive and yet what an inclusive announcement.

This then is the one absolute necessity for service ; and unless each one who is desirous of serving attends to it, his natural selfishness will so overcome him, that he will find himself working from himself, and making his service such an object that, unable to carry all the care of it, he becomes a complainer against others who do not give him the help he covets. If our service, which is of course individual, is to work for unity, it is not only necessary to have oneness of object, but one and only one source of supply. It is only that which comes direct from Christ to anyone which promotes unity amongst those who serve. Of course all saints are intended to serve, yet be it ever remembered that the ministry which meets our need (illustrated so beautifully and fully by the Samaritan), is no material for service, although so needful and blessed as that which sets us free from self-care and self-concern, and enables us to be free to plant ourselves before Him for unfoldings of Himself.

To the youngest then I would say, as you know something of the grace of Christ towards you, let the sense of this grace embolden you to be freely in His company without reserve, so that with undistracted and undiverted attention to Himself, you may hear Him say something of Himself to you, and so be furnished with that knowledge and en-

joyment of Himself, which will enable you to serve Him in making known to others what you have received from Him.

This direct reception from Himself in no wise dispenses with the various channels through which ideas and impressions of Christ may flow to us. The mistake is to give the *channels* the place of the source: and give out as from men instead of as from Christ, and so become mere copyists and parrots, instead of divinely instructed servants. This giving-out from men is not only dishonest and unreal, but also misrepresents the one repeated, by giving out another's ideas and words under quite a different influence of heart and mind. When however all is received from Christ and given out under His influence, the service will not work for preference for men, resulting in parties and divisions, but in oneness of occupation with Him who is the object, source, and enjoyment of all the service.

The evils amongst saints, flowing from readily imbibing what is heard or read, and retailing it as readily, without that exercise before the Lord which is ever necessary to have it from the Lord, are beyond all description. Men and men's words are bound to have an undue place when Christ is neglected; and personal feelings prevail when the influence of Christ is not realized. Let us ever be aware of the tendency of our natural vanity to appear beyond what and where we are in our souls and what we *really* have, thus seeking to shine, as we vainly think, in something of ourselves. Such vanity

is abomination to God, and will never have Divine support. Much of our discouragement is the result of assumption in going quite beyond our measure.

Attention—real heart attention—to Christ, is the one thing that is absolutely necessary in order to serve in a way which really contributes or ministers Christ to souls : and what else can truly draw souls together in a way that is proof against Satan's attacks through the flesh? Take note here, Mary was at the feet of JESUS—that is, Jehovah the Saviour, a Divine Person, the great unchanging I AM in manhood—a Person truly God and yet a Man. At His feet she sat—that is, in abiding posture and attitude—and *heard*. Mark, not simply He spoke, but she heard, and what she heard was His Word—that is, the expression of Himself and Himself expressed. It was indeed the expression to her of a Man who is the Jehovah-God of the Old Testament, and who is now known in all the grace set forth in Him whose name, whose personal name, is JESUS—the true Jehovah, now a Man in Heaven.

What, then, can true service be, save making Him known ; and who is qualified for this but the one who listens and hears, and so understands according to what is expressed in Christ? Depend upon it, our service is a tell-tale as to whether we attend to Christ or neglect Him. If each one were instructed by Christ, and enjoyed Christ, and served under the influence of Christ, what would the effect be—what could it be—save a general effect of what Christ is, upon each and all ?

To serve then under the effect and influence of what God is, as known in a Person who is Divine, and consequently as a Man in every way according to God, is the only true and right influence. We are thus clear of that self which intruded into Martha's service, expressing itself in discontent and dissatisfaction with Mary. A right thing done in a wrong spirit is pretty sure to result in a right thing done in a wrong way—a very frequent source of occasions for the enemy amongst us—and who can maintain a right spirit save he who is consciously under the influence of Christ? Surely then, from the youngest to the eldest, we everyone do well to attend to the necessary hearing the word of Him who alone can give us what will abide and that shall not be taken from us.

What a corruption of Christian ministry and service is the humanly appointed and organised system of religious creeds and services, occupying souls with a merely external order of things suited to the flesh, and in which man can honour himself before men. Even the most scriptural external can never be more than the channel through which the living waters flow. What shall we say then if all be simply externalism in the minds of those who serve? Where is the living stream, then?

Christ is the teacher, Christ is the lesson, Christ is the character of the service (expressing Himself out of hearts enjoying Him, as taught by Him), so that if opportunity for service were no more, the real theme and subject of the service will still re-

main the everlasting portion of the heart which knows Him—as having heard His word. This good part shall never be taken away. Such a statement could not apply to knowledge, however correct, or gift however great, or service however active and useful. It is Himself expressed in a man, heard and understood as taught by Himself, and so understood with the heart in Divine joy, that service is made happy and easy as an outflow because an overflow from the abundance of the heart.

Such servants and such service will promote unity by truly enjoying what they give; and by giving nothing they do not enjoy, they affect others as they are affected even with Christ, the blessed abiding portion of and for all, and who will Himself remain when all else is gone.

II. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN AFFECTION AGAINST THE SUBTLE ENSNARING INFLUENCE OF THIS WORLD, OR THIS PRESENT COURSE OF THINGS.

It is most important to bear in mind that, although the believer is regarded as spiritual when viewed spiritually in connection with spiritual birth and the Spirit and Christ, yet he is on the natural side still human, and compassed about with various infirmities. On these weaknesses Satan ever seeks to exercise his influence by stirring up fleshly

desires, to draw the hearts of God's children away from their Father and His love, as known and enjoyed in His Son, the object of that love. A Christian is not all spiritual ; indeed, he begins very small, even as a babe on the spiritual line, and is then somewhat large on the natural line : that is, rather large in his own eyes. Divine teaching takes him down in his own estimation that he may be exalted in God, as known in love in His Son. Indeed, the whole of the believer's spiritual education is to teach him Divine love as against his natural selfishness, and so reverse the order of his mind and heart by placing the Son and the Father where self is, naturally, in his affections.

The writings of John generally, and especially chapter xvii. of the Gospel, declare this great Divine intention with God's people in Christianity and during their sojourn upon earth. The great Divine thought in it is "that they all may be one," so that the world may believe. Indeed, we might say that one-ness is the burden of the blessed Lord's desires in the whole chapter, and it is pretty certain that the world's belief of the testimony very much hangs upon it.

The position then is briefly—The Father's love on the one side, and the world, in the sense of the principles which govern the world, that is everyone naturally, on the other. That is to say, it is ever a question either of love or lust. Nothing can deliver from lust but love, that is the Father's

love revealed and only learned in the Son. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life describe in a word all that is in the present course of things as to the real nature of it. The Father, that is God revealed in love in His Son, is in direct contrast with the world as so understood.

Therefore, we conclude that what always underlies the lack of true oneness amongst God's children is some allowance within of the principles which govern man naturally. We have all to learn how susceptible we are to these principles, because the natural part of us is not by any means changed nor can ever be whilst we are here. May we not say it is not intended that our Christianity should make us in any way un-natural, but rather to subdue and keep under the natural by means of the superiority of the spiritual. It is only in this way that liberty of spirit, and freedom from worldliness, are possible together. Religiousness after the flesh could never set the heart free, and has ever compelled bondage through fear of worldliness, where ever any sincerity of desire to please God existed.

The last two verses of John xvii. specially shew the situation of God's children on earth in relation to the Father and in contrast to the world. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent me, and I have declared unto them Thy name and will declare it, that the love wherewith Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." We believe that some sense of the great

thoughts and principles set forth in these concluding verses of Christ's instruction to His own in this Gospel is necessary, in order to have any proper idea of worldliness. Even Christians have the strangest ideas of worldliness, taken of course from a false ideal and a fleshly standard. How can anything or everything in this course of things furnish any standard wherewith to judge it? The righteous Father, revealed in the Son who has both exposed and overcome this world, is the only right, true, and correct standard by which to judge this world. How sadly the mass of even God's beloved children are deceived by judging of things after the outward appearance, which is, as chap. vii., 24 of this Gospel shews, in direct contrast with righteous judgment. "Judge not according to sight, but judge righteous judgment."

The righteous Father is then the only true test of all that is worldly in each one. A great religious order of things, in which persons receive honour one of another, only furnishes cover for every worldly principle, for where do the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life flourish so abundantly to-day? Is it not in a great corrupt Christendom where there is the fullest scope for the gratification of every selfish desire under cover of self-denial? The result is an exaltation of man in his own eyes, which will eventually reach its climax in a man sitting in the temple of God and shewing himself that he is God. Self-exaltation is the principle of this world. Self-

abasement is the principle that marked the One here who revealed the Father. What then may we not expect when the principles of this world intrude themselves amongst those who are God's children under cover of zeal, knowledge, honour, distinction, and all that is called good according to a natural religious ideal of goodness? Dissatisfaction must follow, and dissension most surely will follow dissatisfaction. Yes, dissatisfaction is the secret of dissension, and the secret of dissatisfaction is selfishness. Lust is insatiable. On this line there is endless effort for gratification without one bit of real true satisfaction. Oh that we might wake up to the subtlety of these things. We may easily deceive ourselves in thinking how unworldly we are, while indulging in self-gratification under religious and even most scriptural forms. Disagreement with others ever accompanies self-gratification ; for only real true divine love can secure solid agreement.

We are at all times, as to our spirit and affections, either on the line of love or self, which means that we are either in accord with the Father or the world as to what is working within us. Let us remember that the smallest allowance of natural desires amongst brethren inevitably brings in discord. Nature has its place of course, but the Father, that holy name of love, known to us in the One He has sent, is the only standard by which to judge the insidious workings of subtle self in our treacherous hearts. In this way the disturber is

detected, and discord arrested. How important for us who know the Father—of whom the world is entirely ignorant—that we should steer clear of those principles which govern those who are outside this circle of holy love.

The Son has come and declared the Father's Name, and His definite object in doing so is, that the same love of the Father, wherewith He loved His own Son when here, may be in the children, but only on the principle that the Son is in us, which means we believe that it is only because the one object of the Father's love is in us, that His love is in us. Of course we could not be loved apart from the only and proper object of love, that is the Son in manhood, in resurrection, and in glory.

Now this brings us definitely to the point of the way of unity in affection, which supposes one, and only one, object of affection. We believe it to be an unalterable principle, that oneness in any company ever hangs on oneness of object. In the matter of affections, this is particularly the case. Divided affections simply mean divided feelings, and diverse and perverse ways follow. We firmly believe that prior to discord there is ever diversion from the one object of affection. The one point of John's writings from beginning to end is to set the Son before everyone as the grand central object for everybody. It is just and only as this place is truly conceded Him that the world—that is in the sense of the principles of it—is excluded from our hearts; and contrariwise, most surely as this

place is refused Him, the world will be in, and we shall be desiring something felt, or seen, or that makes something of us in the sight of men.

How simple then and how blessed is the Divine way of securing unity of affection amongst God's beloved people, even by giving to each and all of God's children one and the same object of affection which the Father has Himself. Any departure from this must bring in division, even as faithfulness to it must promote unity.

To be strong in this love, the children must have their food, for their spiritual affections need nourishing. To this end we have the bread, the Son Himself, in John vi.—for, while the love of God towards the whole world has been declared in the Son of Man lifted up in chap. iii., the love of the Son and of the Father so made known is as clearly demonstrated in chap. vi. as the true bread for the strengthening of our hearts in these Divine affections. This pure mental milk, this true food for our thoughts to feed upon, is given by way of His death as the great unfolding of love to us in a way that is quite within the reach of our appreciation. Surely the youngest and the weakest can appreciate the Father's heart, as manifested in the Son going into death for us. Here is food for the heart and mind indeed! for who could quietly meditate on the fact of a Divine Person becoming a man and sacrificing Himself so completely, without being so attracted to Him, that He becomes the one absorbing object of the heart, displacing

all that the principles of the world could work by:

Thus the Father's object becomes ours, and the Father's love our all satisfying portion in the Son, shutting out the world and every element of discord and division, and securing that oneness for which the blessed One poured out His heart's desires to His Father, in the midst of His own, before He went back to His Father.

We thus see the necessity, we trust, for oneness of affection whilst we are in this world, and also whilst surrounded by a great religious order of things where so much abounds by which the selfishness of the flesh can so easily take advantage, by introducing the principles of the world amongst us under cover of zeal for all kinds of things which are so easily made paramount, when judging of things according to sight and sense.

Let us ever take to heart that no amount of advantages and privileges, however highly prized and tenaciously held, can possibly furnish ability to maintain unity. The history of Christianity has furnished abundant and most convincing examples of this, again and again. Even in the Apostles' days this was manifest in various persons and occurrences. In these last days the failure to maintain unity is universally manifest and as universally deplored. Does not this abundantly prove the necessity for something more than anything or everything of a merely outward character, however good or blessed? Yes; these considerations call for serious attention to that divine way which

affects the inner man of the heart, and, by the effect of holy love proved in death, so purifies the inward affections in connection with a pure and holy object, that there is no desire succumbed to, by which our hearts might be entangled in the snares of this present evil world.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.” This is Divinely wise counsel given by Wisdom to her son. Hundreds of years before that same Wisdom supplied the means by which it could be practically and effectually carried out. Now, thank God, it is possible, for Christianity has come and supplies an object for the heart outside this poor world, and all its snares and delusions. Depend upon it, outside this Divine object of Divine affections there is no escape from the world; and more, all outside this blessed One is an idol. The true God and eternal life are here, and we thus know the true God truly in the One in whom we are before Him.

Christians will never maintain unity on the lines of Christendom, much as it may be desired, neither will any company, however privileged, without oneness of object of affection; for unity of affection is the inviolable bond against our constant tendency to divided feelings, contending for our own desires.

May we so know Divine Persons that we may be more truly devoted in heart and spirit to the One Divine object of affection, and so escape the principles of this world, and be able to maintain oneness against every influence to the contrary.

III. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT, AGAINST THE EFFECT OF OUR NATURAL DIVERSITY.

What we have heretofore considered on this subject may be more correctly regarded as oneness than unity, because whether the subject be viewed as individual supply for individual service, or the oneness of effect on all hearts by one object of affection, each individual is still regarded as an individual person in his own personality, although so personally supplied and affected that the result is oneness or unity in that sense. The two previous aspects of this subject may therefore be accepted as preparatory—in a sense preliminary—to what follows in connection with the unity of the spirit and the unity of the faith.

We are necessarily carried to the 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians as the basis of our remarks, for this is the only place where the expression "Unity of the Spirit" occurs. Now unity, as distinct from oneness, is an existing thing to be individually regarded and maintained, and in this way very distinct from a oneness effected by individuals being each supplied from one source or affected by one object. Oneness is more in the way of individuals each and all moving on together in agreement and harmony, whether in service or affection. Unity is that each one forms an integral and indispensable part of a complete whole, and

supposes that each part acts in his own peculiar place in harmony with, and in distinct relation to, the whole. Unity may be compared to a delicate and finely skilled piece of mechanism, in which, while each part works, yet every part works, and they all work together, each individual part in that sense being merged in the whole. It supposes that each part, yea the whole, is influenced, moved, propelled, and carried on by one law of attraction power and sustainment. Moreover, the movement of each part and of the whole is in view of some definite end.

Therefore, as already said, when unity is in view, it is an existing, unalterable thing, and which each individual on the side of his walk and behaviour is called upon to accord with, and to which he is intended to subordinate everything of an individual nature and character. He may be ignorant of it to his own loss, he may be disobedient to it to his own discomfiture of spirit, yet he cannot alter it or affect it in the least degree, for it lies beyond all human reach in the spirit, and belongs to a kind and character of wisdom which is all various or many coloured, and which was in the mind of God from all eternity, and only possible of display in the body of Christ for the glory of God in Christ. It is doubtless for God's glory that there should be something on earth, consequent on the rejection of Christ, during His absence, and in the very sphere of the enemy's power, which, being entirely spiritual in character, completely baffles Satan and men

whatever ability, religious or otherwise, they may have, and which commands the admiring attention of angelic hosts as they thus behold God's great wisdom. This unity doubtless embraces all true believers as those who have the Spirit, and are thus in the Spirit; and surely all such are in this way called upon to walk worthy of a heavenly vocation while here on earth, and to shew that heavenly order can be maintained even here in the scene of Satan's power by those who are spiritually seated in the heavenlies in Christ, far above every disturbing element here below. It is God's purpose for His beloved people to have them realize themselves—in their souls—as far above all that is moveable as Christ the Head is actually and bodily.

What a wondrous vocation then is ours as believers on the Lord Jesus Christ, what soul elevation it imparts, what superiority of heart and spirit above all merely human thoughts and motives, in order that God's people may act together, notwithstanding all the working of wicked spirits in falsity on our feebleness, to hinder our obedience to the truth.

This unity then, being entirely spiritual in its character, can only be kept by every natural quality being thoroughly subdued on the one hand, and on the other the most diligent attention to objects which are every one entirely outside nature, and therefore can have nothing for the flesh in them. Mark, it is to be *kept*, not *produced*, for it is an existing unity which is of the Spirit, and therefore

beyond the reach of Satan and man either to make or mar it. Diligence is called for, soul diligence, diligence after those objects which are all unseen. What wonderful diligence is this, and what a contrast to mere religious diligence after an external visible order of things.

We would here note that *whenever the external amongst believers, however good and right, becomes paramount in any soul, such an one is thereby rendered incompetent to keep this unity*, and he will surely strike out a course of his own in keeping with his individual characteristics. Now all this sort of thing has to be brought down, in order that he may move with the Spirit and so with those who move with the Spirit likewise. Therefore we can understand something of the necessity for the way we are instructed to keep this unity with diligence. This way is well balanced subjectively and objectively as we may say. On the subjective side we have the passive qualities which are so needed for keeping this unity. On the objective side we have seven ones, all ones—but seven of them—and as we have said they are all outside nature, and therefore are all spiritual in their character and significance.

All lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, describe the moral subjective condition necessary for keeping this unity. The ones, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, over all, through all, and in us all

present what must be diligently observed objectively by each one who gives diligence to keep this unity. So we may conclude that the keeping this unity is no mystic thing, no sentimental reverie, but an intelligent practical reality maintained and enjoyed in the blessed traits of holy love, and in the knowledge and realization of a perfection of ones exclusive of all save themselves and as inclusive as they are exclusive.

It is well carefully to note the true character of ONE. How entirely and completely exclusive is number one. We may see this in a sense even naturally, but how much more so when the ones are of such a nature that there is not and cannot be another, but only one. These ones are absolutely the only ones of their kind: comparison is here excluded, they stand alone, forbidding either imitation or rivalry. Thus one body excludes any and every other body. The one who keeps this unity cannot entertain even the thought of any body of Christians save one. He compares not one body of Christians with another to the advantage of the one which he regards as his own, for he only thinks of *one* body, and this pronounces every other body an assumption, for no mere section could claim this one body as theirs. How simply the thought of one excludes all save itself, and leaves the soul in simple holy separation from all substitutes and imitations.

In like manner one Spirit excludes every other spirit of whatever nature, and leaves the judgment

clear and definite as to any right or wrong spirit at work. The very oneness of this Spirit forbids any thought of independence of each other, for the one Spirit which each has, all have; no one has an independent spirit to himself, for there is but one Spirit. It at once places all believers on common ground with each other, and demonstrates to each one that whatever he has all others have, and that what all others have he has. What a bulwark is this against the dividing tendency of natural diversity. One body and one Spirit are thus exclusive of all separate bodies of Christians, condemning them utterly, and in no wise allowing even a few in separation from all others to regard themselves as a body, for this would be a denial of the one body and be assuming another. Also one Spirit excludes all independence of spirit and quite disallows any departure from common ground and common interest with and in the whole of God's people.

The one hope of the calling of all believers is quite in harmony with the oneness of the body and the Spirit, and thoroughly rebukes any desire to have or to hold something of a religious character here peculiar to any section and not common to all. So that we here see the balance of the sanctuary, and understand that the present character and constitution of a heavenly people on the earth is quite in keeping with its one hope of that which is established and secured in the Head on high.

Nor are the ones less exclusive on the side of our

profession here before men. We have but one Lord, every other authority is thus excluded. Neither individuals nor companies can consistently recognize human authority as Christians. Authority there must be because of what we are as men, for we ever need the fear of the Lord, and subduedness of heart under His powerful hand. Yet all have one and the same Lord, and we may be sure that as He the only Lord is truly owned, all other authority is excluded, and we find ourselves on common ground with each other as we each and all own and yield to the one Lord.

The one baptism speaks of our burial with Him, and thus tells us that we have no religious status as God's present people in this scene, nothing here can claim us in a religious sense, for we have been buried and the name of the one Lord has been called upon each and every one. To Him then we are alone responsible and accountable, to Him we alone belong who is in heaven, and to nothing here whether persons, names, or organisations.

The one faith quite accords with this, for what is the Christian faith but the report of that which is set forth in our Lord Jesus risen and glorified. The true, the one faith, the only faith, is the light to and in our souls of the blessed One in resurrection and glory, in whom alone all Divine light now shines. The Gospels and the Old Testament must be read in the light of that which the epistles make known to us concerning our Lord Jesus in heaven whilst hid in God. There is no other faith

now as the light in which to see any part of Scripture in its proper bearing. This faith is the only faith, and excludes every other, and certainly this faith is the common faith of all believers, and cannot be peculiar to any few.

Then surely there is but one God and one Father—the source of everything that belongs to us, and who is over all that exists, and who has an overruling hand through all that occurs, and is in each one of us who are His, by His Spirit and in our affections.

How much then is involved in the real, true and constant recognition of these ONES. They are ones indeed, yet they are seven, and are thus indivisible and must ever go together. Seven, as we know, is the highest prime number, and indicates indivisibility. The ones are *seven*, and yet they are seven ones. They must of course be regarded singly, and yet held all together, not one singled out to the exclusion of the others.

This then, is the unity that is of the Spirit, consisting of ones which are indivisible, and yet perfect all round; for what is there which any or all saints need for unity against all our diverse tendencies which is not supplied in these seven ones. There is surely enough here to hold all God's people together against all that which we are in ourselves as men and women, who naturally are so prone to boast in something peculiar to ourselves, and in which we can distinguish ourselves from others. This divine way of unity excludes

all this kind of thing, and shuts us up to what is ONE ; Divine perfection of oneness, of Divine Persons and Divine things, whether in regard to what is purely spiritual, or profession, or even creation. We surely then have in these ones a fulness in regard to every circle in which we have to move, and which can fill us all with one and the same fulness, holding us in commonness of object and enjoyment.

However, it is only in lowliness and meekness, long suffering and forbearance, that undistracted attention to these ones can be maintained. High-mindedness, self-assertion, impatience, or insisting and forcing, are all forbidden in the mind of the one who keeps this unity in faithfulness to these ones.

The chapter further shews that grace is given to everyone of us, according to the grace in which Christ Himself went down to the lowest parts of the earth, and is now supplied us from Him in the highest place, so that we have no excuse for failing to keep the unity of the spirit in the uniting bond of Peace.

IV. THE WAY TO MAINTAIN UNITY IN THE UNITY OF THE FAITH, AGAINST THE TENDENCY TO INDEPENDENT SYSTEMATIZED TEACHING OR THEOLOGY.

One very remarkable feature of the course of every distinguished leader in teaching or preaching, in the whole history of Christianity since the Apostles' days, has been manifest in the way each one has—almost without exception—systematized or organised his ideas and his work. The little which each one has received from the Head, and that which he has been as a gift, has in most cases been held and regarded as though it were all, and nothing more to be had. A certain fear of losing the precious little received has so taken possession of the heart and mind of the most gifted men, that they have most generally resorted to a sort of conservative action of putting into the form of a creed, or a system of religion, or sectarian organisation, that which they had evidently divinely received. As far as we know it is only with very few exceptions that this course has in any way been definitely departed from, and the gift and the truth given kept clear of human creed and system in any degree whatever.

This is one of the most subtle forms that our natural independency can take, because it is carried on under cover of zeal for the truth, and in a certain way it is so. Yet it is zeal for truths rather,

and that too in a way by which the truth is eventually lost, through becoming leavened by the human mould into which everything is necessarily cast, when held in connection with the men through whom as vessels the Head has been pleased to communicate. That which has been doubtless given by the Head, whether in the form of men, gifts, or truths, thus becomes corrupted and even ends in systematized error, by which means the cunning craftiness of the human mind under Satan's influence works out a system of things devoid of all divine principle, in which poor souls are tossed to and fro under human influences, with every wind that blows of ever-changing teaching, giving nothing stable on which souls can truly rest.

The verses of Eph. iv. 11-16 would appear to contemplate all this state of things, and provide against it most effectually by simply giving the full thought of the Head in bestowing the gifts, and in regard to all ministry through them. Indeed the closest attention to these verses seems called for, in order to avoid holding truths received in a humanly classified and merely doctrinal form in our minds. No doubt we naturally have a sort of liking for wordy precision in Divine things, as though they were mere science or philosophy. We thus forget their true and holy character and Divine greatness, for Divine things are too great to be thus treated; they are not to be cut and dried as though any man or all men together could use words expressing everything that is to be conveyed,

and leave no room for more, for surely there is infinitely more than can ever be expressed in words.

The Unity of the Faith forbids all this personal limitation of Divine truths, and shuts out all self-contained individualism, whether in thought or manner, and yet gives each component part its own proper place. There is in this unity only One Person in view, that is the Son of God; all others are regarded as merely vessels of supply to the whole, or mutual contributors as joints of supply to each other. However, the Head first supplies all, and nothing is really supply but that which is from Himself, and be it ever remembered that whatever He supplies is in view of Himself, as the One to grow up in, and is to be held as the knowledge of the Son of God; that is to say, as knowledge of the One in whom the truth, as to God Himself is alone to be learned.

The Son of God is the central figure of this teaching as to the unity of the faith, yea of all teaching, for He is Son of God, and that, too, as a Man on the part of God, to make God known in a true way against all the lies of Satan against God. To this end then all the gifts are given and all mutual supply is directed. All is in view of knowledge, the knowledge of the Son of God, that is the knowledge of God as thus made known.

The true evangelist goes forth as one Divinely impressed by the Head as the true light of God. This blessed, precious sense of God he carries everywhere, enlightening poor ignorant man with

that true knowledge of who and what God is, as he himself knows and enjoys Him in His Son. He is thus used of the Head to impress souls with that impression of God which he has himself received from the Head, who alone is the true expression and impression on our hearts of God Himself. Evangelizing is therefore something much more than announcing *facts of scripture* however correctly done. It is nothing less than the outpouring of a heart overjoyed with what God is as impressed by what He is in His Son. The true evangelist yearns over souls in all the affections of God Himself, towards His creature, as found in His Son, according to all that has been expressed in this world in His Son's life and death. His sense of what God is, for and to the creature, in His Son, quite transcends all sense of even the creature's need, and yet enables him to present what fully meets the need, filling his soul with an importunity flowing from a godly concern, lest anyone should miss such wondrous knowledge and remain in darkness forever under Satan's power.

In like manner the pastors and teachers are those who have had given them other impressions of the same Head, which enable them to impress saints with His care for them and interest in them, even as the evangelists towards sinners. It is a great error on the part of any gift to suppose that he has any genuine care for souls—be they sinners or saints—that is really his own care or interest in any way apart from Christ. If any one cares from

himself for souls, there will be self in it, and it will never promote unity. All genuine care for souls must be held by each one as simply and only the care of Christ with which he is impressed.

When the evangelist cares for sinners as from Christ, and the pastor and teacher care for saints as from Christ, each one being simply an expression of the care of the Head, there can be no schools of opinion, no classes of servants and service, no divided interests in the service, no creeds and faiths. All works back to the source from whence it came, and in the knowledge of the Son of God, promotes that maturity of soul-growth by which each one arrives at a realization of the unity of the different parts of that one faith, which is the light in each soul of the glorious Son of God.

So that whilst the evangelist is much more than an announcer of scriptural facts as we have said, the pastor and teacher are much more than mere expounders of Scripture. They command the affections of the saints by impressing them with the affections of Christ towards them and His interest in them as being so impressed themselves. They are conscious that the impression conveyed is of much greater moment than any information communicated, however important and correct that may be.

It is of all moment to have a true sense of what gift means in this day of grace. It is ability doubtless, yet ability in the sense of ability to impress people's hearts with a true impression of God in

Christ, whether as enlightening benighted souls, or building up enlightened souls. Such gifts will continue no doubt until every one comes to the unity of the one faith as apprehended in a Divine Person in manhood, by those who are grown up in their ideas of God and His things, as so understood.

How very far then beneath the dignity of gift is any desire or attempt to form or establish anything either doctrinal or ecclesiastical on earth, instead of simply forming souls in that which is set forth in our exalted Head : and so educating them in all that which will hereafter be displayed of Himself in His own, when He shall be glorified in all them who believe. We make no particular remark as to the other gifts, the Apostles and Prophets, for they were inaugurators, and have done their work as such, being the foundation. The record of them and their spirit and work is fully preserved to us in their epistles, which prove how thoroughly they had in every way "the unity of the faith."

On the other hand what a manifest failure as to this unity is shewn in the whole history of Christendom, for while each true believer and every section of Christians, so to speak, has had some real genuine truth, some feature say of this one faith, yet how strikingly has the ability to hold that little together been lacking. We believe that this lack may be simply traced to the little understanding there has been of the Person of Christ, the Son of God, and in not holding all truths as some unfolding of Himself, for the whole of the faith most

certainly has its substantive answer in His glorious Person. Of course Christ the Head is everything that ever will be expressed in God's order of things, and though He be presented and ministered in various characters, positions and glories, yet every detail of that which is reported of Him whilst hidden, and received and effected in those who believe individually, is but an integral and component part of one great whole, and that is Himself—Jesus the Son of God.

Can anything be more lamentable than to hear men well instructed in truths and facts of Scripture setting truth against truth and fact against fact, all because they fail to discern the true relation of one truth and fact to another, and of each detail to the whole? What an exposure of our infantile stature all this is, for if we were at all grown-up in the stature of the fulness of the Christ, we would be able to see the relation of details to the whole, and the bearing of the whole on the details, and so hold different ideas in unity, because held as something that the Son of God is, and not merely as statements of Scripture.

Let us not deceive ourselves on the matter of soul-growth, for real growth is up to Him, and is marked by enlargement in what He is. If anyone's faith is something he believes about Christ, something of the Spirit's report of Him, whoever it may be through as the instrumentality, then that is truly faith. It has come by a report, for the One reported is hidden in God, but if held in the soul as some

feature of Christ as the Son of God, the new and glorious Head, it will not be found to be out of gear with what others have and hold in like manner. In short we fail to see any unity of belief, apart from the Divine person of the Son of God. How immensely important it is to be able to hold each and every part of the one faith, truly adjusted in our souls by holding it in relation to the Person who is the very substance of all that is reported. May we ask have we ever a meeting over scripture when our weakness in this respect is not more or less manifest? Let this then have its proper effect upon us, and exercise us in the way of holding the Head as Head, for it is only when He is truly paramount in our souls that we are able to discern the proper bearing of things.

We see then that all true gift is an impression of Christ, conveying to others an impression of Christ in the grace of Christ and under the influence of Christ. The ministry thus given is to promote growth in what Christ is, even up to no less a standard than His own measure as a Man, and so make everyone a contributor in his own place of that which compacts and consolidates, in order that God's people may be an immoveable people, not moved by any self-consideration whatever, because of holding all as from Christ, and to Christ as the Head. In this way He imparts His own character to everything in our souls, and as being Himself everything in our eyes, enables us to see the true bearing of every part to the whole, that is to Him.

self, who is the whole.

Thank God, then, there is still a way of unity open to each and all of us, notwithstanding the endless and unalterable confusion around us in a great christendom where, alas! man's way prevails. This way of unity thus briefly stated lies in

- I. Attention to Jesus, the true Jehovah Saviour, as the only one who can give His own word, and thus supply each one with spiritual material wherewith to serve Him.
- II. Attention to the Son as the one and only object of Divine affection, made appreciable by us in His death, and so find deliverance from the principles of this evil world.
- III. Attention, in all lowliness and meekness, etc., to those Divinely-given "ones," so Divinely great and exclusive, that diversity becomes no hindrance to unity; and
- IV. Attention to the Son of God, the new and glorious Head, as the One in whom everything that is truly faith finds its adjustment.

Such is, we believe God's way of Unity in Christianity, left open in these last days for the faithful who are willing to take it at all cost to themselves.

Doubtless this way will cost us much as to ourselves, and what we are in ourselves, yet the gain

and blessing are incalculable, and everyone who avails himself of this way, whether in regard to service, or the world, or natural diversity, or the one faith, will, we believe, promote unity amongst God's people, and give glory to the Lord, and have the answer of Divine approval in his own soul.