

BRIEF NOTES ON KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

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A collection of articles and writings by H.H. Snell from Brief Notes on Keeping the Unity of the Spirit, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

2 Chapters

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Ephesians 4:3, 4

We are enjoined to be “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” or “to be giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” Now what are we to understand by keeping this unity? What is it? Before, however, we look at what it is, it may be well to Consider what it is not.

1. Keeping the Spirit's unity is not merely a congregational union. There may be considerable oneness of mind and judgment with Christians who compose a particular Congregation, which, after all, may be only independency; or, one congregation choosing to act independently of all other congregations of Christians. The Holy Spirit dwells in, and acts in, the church, all over the world. There is really nothing between independency and keeping the Spirit's unity.
2. It is not a sectarian union, or acting together on a sectarian principle, even if all the saints in the world were on such ground.
3. It is not a union of sects, however many of the sects, as sects, were congregated together and acting together.
4. It is not always proved by unanimity, however much it is desired; for the Corinthians seem to have been unanimous in keeping in their midst one defiled with flagrant evil; and were evidently not unanimous in putting away from among themselves the “wicked person”. (See 2 Corinthians 12:20, 21.) It is not a question of majority, of minority, or of unanimity, but What is the Lord's mind? What is the path marked out by the “One Spirit”?
5. It is not merely union, even of the best kind; for are not all saints, however erring, forever in living union with each other and with the Lord?
6. It is not anything short of unity — a unity which can be kept only by those who are members of “one body” of which Christ in heaven is the Head. When we read in Malachi 3:16 of those who “feared the Lord”.... “and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels,” the prophet is speaking of a God-fearing remnant of Jews, not of the members of “one body” — the assembly, Neither are “fellows” the same as members of one body. Again, “brethren” dwelling “together in unity” will have its fulfillment in millennial times of Israel's blessing on earth — a unity of brothers — not the membership of one body, God's present order of blessing. This the nation of Israel never will be. There is one body. The idea of “twelve tribes” is very different from that of “one body”. (See Psalms 133; Hebrews 1:9; Ephesians 5:30.)

Now let us consider what keeping the Spirit's unity is:

1. Saints only can keep it. Such are exhorted to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we are called endeavoring to keep it.

2. This unity is to be kept, not made. Those who attempt to make it show that they do not keep the Spirit's unity which has been made.

3. It is not merely union, but unity — "One new man", formed of members on earth united to Christ the Head in heaven. So one, that Jesus, the glorified Man, could say to a hater of His members on earth, "Why persecutest thou ME?" Observe, not "mine" merely, but 'his'; and the Holy Spirit speaks of such now as "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Again the unity is formed and energized, and all the members taught, led, and acted on, by "one Spirit". The "one bread", or loaf, on the Lord's Table, shows it to be the Lord's mind that this unity should be expressed "till he come". (See 1 Corinthians 10:17.) It is blessed to know this!

4. It is of such a spiritual nature that it can only be kept "with all lowliness and meekness, and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." There is no room for carnal weapons. When this unity is truly kept, it will be in the uniting bond of peace. What a precious bond! Those who are walking proudly and in self-will cannot therefore be keeping this unity.

5. It is a holy unity, for the Spirit is "holy". Nothing therefore unsuited to Him, who is "the holy and the true", can be consistent with keeping the Spirit's unity. Separation from evil is therefore imperative. "Let him that nameth the name of the Lord depart from inequity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

6. It is according to the truth, for "the Spirit is truth", and He guides into all the truth. Keeping the Spirit's unity therefore excludes everything contrary to "the truth".

7. It is a unity which comprehends nothing less than every member of the "one body". Practically it considers every saint in Christ Jesus, and is associated with all who are endeavoring to keep this unity. It cannot, therefore, be sectarian, however it may appear to be so. Such love all saints, pray for all saints, and would walk with all saints, if they could do so according to the truth.

8. It is the Spirit's unity because the path and power of keeping it is by one Spirit all over the world, wherever saints are. "He that hath an ear" is therefore enjoined to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches", or assemblies. In keeping this holy unity then the action of "one Spirit" is recognized, and practically owned, wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus own His presence and the Holy Ghost sent down. Wherever in this way a case has been judged it is not judged elsewhere, but the judgment of those who have thus judged it is accepted as owning "one Spirit".

It is important to distinguish between purging out and purging from. In the normal state of the church when all who believed were together, and all outside were unbelievers, it was said "purge out"; for for a time of ruin — a great house — when all kinds of evil have been associated with the name of our precious Lord Jesus, the faithful are also told to "purge from". (1 Cor. 5:7; 2 Tim. 2:19-21.)

9. The path in thus "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" must, therefore, be connected with practical separation from those who are acting contrary to the truth, and holiness, and ways of the Spirit's unity. We may cross the street to greet one whom we believe to be a member of the "one body", and so far be endeavoring to keep the Spirit's unity, even though his sectarian ways forbid us going with him further.

Communion with the Lord through His truth will guide us as to these things, and every other act, for the glory of God.

Those, therefore, who are intelligently keeping the Spirit's unity recognize that the same Holy Spirit as a divine person dwells in every child of God all over the world, that all have access unto the Father through the Lord Jesus by one Spirit, and that God dwells through the Spirit all over the earth where the Lord's name is professed — the house. They gladly own all true believers on earth united by one Spirit to Christ in heaven, as members of one body, "one new man"; and, while doing so, wait "for God's Son from heaven" — the "one hope" of our calling. It is impossible, therefore, to own two or more companies of saints in any place who are not in fellowship as according to the truth, for there is "One body"; or to own different ways of dealing with the same matters in discipline, for there is "One Spirit"; or to hold diverse hopes, for there is "One hope". A lowly mind, and waiting on the Lord in meekness are needed to enable any to receive, hold, and act out these things. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa. 25:9).

H. H. S.

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