

Unity and Diversity

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine Christian experience, the oneness of Christian experience, and the benefits of spiritual union and communion with other believers.

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Diversity"

Description

J.C. Philpot emphasizes the importance of unity and diversity in the experiences of God's people, comparing it to the beauty of variety and oneness in the natural creation. He highlights how genuine accounts of Christian experience impress the heart and conscience, bringing the weighty matters of eternity vividly before the eyes. Philpot stresses that true grace in the heart of a Christian unites with grace in others, fostering a blessed bond of union among the family of God, even amidst trials and divisions. He concludes by pointing out that while there is great diversity in the experiences of believers, there is a pervading oneness and harmony that runs through them, reflecting the key-note of God's work in their lives.

Transcript

Unity and Diversity

by J. C. Philpot

Next to the word of life and the preached gospel, and, we may perhaps add, the conversation of the tried and favored among the people of God, there are few things more edifying to the soul than the records of the experience of the living family. Even in natural biography there is for most readers a peculiar charm. The pulses of human life so beat in unison, heart so echoes to heart in man to man, even as it lies buried amid the ruins of the fall, that most are riveted by any well written, detailed description of the varied circumstances and incidents that have stamped a character on the writer's life. And most have a history to relate, a tale of joys and sorrows, of marked providences and striking incidents, were they able to recollect or willing to detail the varied events that have tracked their path and lie buried in the secret depths of their bosom.

But if this be true naturally, how much more so spiritually! Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," Hart's "Experience," Huntington's "Kingdom of Heaven"--where, in the whole range of spiritual reading, can we find three more edifying books? They are the concentrated kernel of well near everything else that these gracious men of God wrote. "The Pilgrim's Progress" lies deeply imbedded in "Grace Abounding"--the

Hymns of Hart in his "Experience"--and the more than twenty volumes of the immortal Coal-heaver in "The Kingdom of Heaven taken by Prayer."

If our books were placed on different shelves according to their worth and value, these would occupy the first, and few, perhaps, be found worthy to stand by their side. But as preachers have been owned and blessed who have not had the gifts and knowledge, power and utterance of Huntington, and writers been honored who had neither the temptations of Bunyan nor the experience of Hart, so there are other records of Christian experience which well deserve a place on the shelves and in the hearts of those that fear God. Where these accounts are genuine, clear, deep, and powerful, they impress the heart and conscience in an indescribable manner. The weighty things of eternity are brought vividly before the eyes--the reality of true religion, the blessedness of those who are taught and favored of God, the fallacy of a dead profession, the truth of the Scriptures, the oneness of the Spirit's teaching--all seem to be impressed on the soul of the spiritual reader when he sees them take this living, breathing form, and thus stamped as by the creating hand of God.

And when we can follow the suffering saints from their first convictions to their deliverance, and then all through the wilderness of temptation to a dying bed, and see the faithfulness of God and the efficacy of his superabounding grace manifested from first to last, how it makes us admire and adore the depth and fullness of his infinite and eternal love! Grace in the heart of a Christian is thus seen as in the mirror. In the Person and work of the Lord Jesus is grace revealed, in the word of truth is it made known; but it is only as let down into the heart that it is tasted, handled, felt, and realized!

Now grace in the heart of one child of God will ever unite with grace in the heart of another. If there be jars and divisions, if there be dispute and contention in churches and among individuals, let not these be fathered on religion. It is not grace but lack of it that gives them birth and maintains them in being. So far as grace rules and reigns, so far as the life of God is made manifest in the conscience, there is a blessed bond of union among the family of God. This bond of union may indeed lie very deep or be much hidden and covered--the brook of love that once flowed strong and clear may be diminished to a trickling rill--circumstances may separate the chief friends--ministers may be divided, churches split, congregations dispersed, the dearest ties severed--because iniquity abounds the love of many may wax cold.

But love itself can never die, for life and love are so one that love can only die with life, and life the with love. It is one of the three abiding graces; and as faith never ceases out of the believer's heart, nor hope quite dies out of his soul, so love, however low it may sink or cold it may grow, never gives up the spirit. If a man could cease to love he would cease to believe; and if he could cease to believe he would cease to live; and if he ceased to live he would die out of the body of Christ as a dead branch out of a tree. But this we know is impossible with the people, of God. "My sheep shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand;" "Because, I live, you shall live also."

That there is a great diversity in the experience of the Lord's people must be acknowledged; but there is a oneness, notwithstanding, running through and shining forth amid that diversity. A few moments may not be out of place in glancing at this subject. Oneness, with diversity, is the peculiar feature of the work of God as seen in the visible creation. It is the grand clue that leads the naturalist through the labyrinth of created beings with which we are surrounded, from the stars that spangle the sky to the grass that we tread under our feet. Not to mention God's noblest work, man, created in his own image, after his own likeness, in the features of whose countenance there is the greatest diversity, with oneness of original design and form, there is not a leaf that waves on the trees nor a flower that blows in garden or field that is

not different, and yet alike--alike in type and nature, different in size, shape, or color; alike as a whole, different in detail.

And if natural creation present this beautiful combination of variety and oneness, shall not the spiritual creation bear a similar impress of God's handiwork? That there is a striking analogy between the old creation and the new is most plain. The figures and parables, comparisons, and similitudes that meet us in well near every page of Old Testament and New amply prove this; for were there no resemblance between the work of creation and the work of grace there could be no room for such comparisons.

In true experience, then, viewed as the product of God's hand, there must be oneness. It is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." "For as the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:12, 13.) Without this oneness there could be neither union nor communion. In grace as in nature, there must be a face to look at and love. "Your neck," says the Bridegroom to the Bride, "is as a tower of ivory; your eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, your nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus." (Song 7:4.) The graces of the Spirit typified by the features of her face drew forth his love. "Turn away your eyes, for they have overcome me." (6:5.) When we gaze upon a human countenance we instinctively look for features. Without eyes, nose, mouth, and the other features, and these blended and assimilated in some proportion and harmony, it would not be the face of a man but of a monster. In the work of God on the soul, must there not be equally marked features? And do we not look, as if instinctively, for them?

In hearing or reading, then, some professed account of the Lord's dealings with the soul, are we not obliged sometimes to stop and say, "Well, there is something here like face; but where are the eyes, where the nose, the mouth, and chin? Why, with all its roundness and softness, its form and coloring, it is after all but a mass of flesh--a misshapen mummy; or if there be something in it like eyes, they are certainly in the wrong place, in the cheek or chin, and the nose, where the forehead should be. Is this a face to draw forth love? It rather creates disgust." Is there not much of this in the religious world? Taking the word experience in the broad, and, we may say, misused sense, of mere feelings, without regard to their source, nature, and end, the world is full of it. Does not the Wesleyan class leader catechize his young brood about their experience? and does not the Romish priest draw forth the workings of the heart from his female penitents? True experience is not mere feeling, as feeling, but an experience of the power, presence, grace, and teaching of God in the soul. When, then, we examine much that is called experience, it is like looking at what claims to be a human face.

And what are many such countenances? Some are like the gutta percha faces--the new toy that amuses children, which can be pulled and squeezed, made long or short, round or square, to smile or frown, and yet always in the end resumes its vacant, unmeaning stare. Hundreds of such experiences are every year manufactured to order. Others possess no features at all--a mere mummy and mass of flesh; or, if any features, all in their wrong places. Liberty before bondage, gospel before law, deliverance before the prison, pardon before guilt, assurance before unbelief, redemption before captivity, mercy before misery; eyes, nose, mouth, chin, and cheeks all topsy-turvy, all in their wrong place. Aye, and some features altogether wanting--holes instead of eyes, or no eyes at all; a cheek all over the face, forehead and chin clean shaved away. How many have what they call faith and yet no repentance, knowledge and no contrition, confidence and no fear, boldness and no humility, praise and no prayer, singing and no sorrowing, rejoicing and no mourning, victory without fighting, resurrection without dying, and glory in

prospect without grace in possession! What can we make out of all this? Are we harsh, bigoted, uncharitable, if we cannot admire nor love such an eyeless, noseless, chinless face? Show us real, well-placed, harmonious features, and we can admire and love them; but not a featureless, disfigured countenance--a cross between presumption and ignorance. Let us have eyes, and we shall not inquire whether they be blue or black; a nose, and we shall not be particular as to its shape or size. Oneness without variety would be sameness; variety without oneness would be disfigurement.

Amid, then, all the variety of gracious experience, there is, as in the human countenance, a pervading oneness and a harmony, which, like the key-note of an air in music, runs through and blends the whole. For there is a variety, a beautiful variety in the experience of God's family. Each tuneful bird has its own note, each fragrant flower its own smell, each season its own beauty; and each child of God his own experience. Their trials, temptations, afflictions, providences, mercies, miseries, are not made in the same exact mold, nor cut in the same precise pattern. Some sink more deeply, and others rise more highly; some are faint and feeble, and others lively and strong; some are slow, late, and long, others, quick, early, and short; some are cropped in their bloom, and others hang until their leaves get brown and dusky; some promise well at the outset and perform poorly, others promise but indifferently and ripen better; with some, clouds and rain last nearly all day until there is a glorious sunset, with others, cloudy bars are stretched across their evening rays, though their morning might have been bright and clear; some walk tenderly and humbly all their days, and others bring grief on themselves and others by their carelessness and carnality.

Yet amid all this variety there is oneness. The misery of sin, the vileness and deceitfulness of the heart, the guilt and bondage that allowed carnality produces, the mercy and patience of God and the super-aboundings of his grace, the suitability and preciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the emptiness of all created things, the assaults and fiery darts of Satan, the doubts and fears that spring up within when night comes on and the beasts of the forest prowl forth, the cries and sighs that go up unto the Lord when the battle is hot and victory hangs trembling in the balance, the sweetness of the promises as applied to the soul, the certainty and security of the elect, with the other blessed truths of the gospel, as appropriated and realized--in all these features of divine experience, there is a sweet oneness of spirit among all the family of God. To see, to feel, to realize this oneness is to experience spiritual union and communion with the members of the body of Christ. This is the "communion of saints"--an article of the apostles' creed, but to most, as dead and dry an article as the gilded sentence that stands at the east end of a church, or the whole of the thirty-nine articles to a young curate pouncing upon a living as a duck upon a worm.

But the "communion of saints" is as much a living article of a Christian's faith as "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." This is the mystical tie that knits heart to heart. This Jonathan felt to David, Elisha to Elijah, Asaph to the generation of God's children, (Ps. 73:15), the saints to each other in those Pentecostal days when they were of "one heart and one soul," Paul to the Corinthian believers, (2 Cor. 12:15,) and the early Christians when the wondering heathens said, "See how these Christians love one another."

Here, then, is one of the main benefits and blessings of those accounts of real Christian experience which we are sometimes favored with. They much tend to the edifying of the body in love. They strengthen faith, encourage hope, and draw forth love, tenderness, and affection. The faithfulness of God is seen in living examples, his dealings seem brought near, and there is a sweet testimony that the Lord still reigns, that he has not forgotten the earth, and that a seed still serves him.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/unity-and-diversity/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net