

# Unity & Diversity

by J.C. Philpot

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of visible unity among believers, which is a fruit of the Spirit's work in their hearts, and encourages leaders and ministers to promote love and harmony among believers.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 21:2, Psalm 139:16, Amos 3:3, John 17:20, Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Hebrews 5:7

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Christian Harmony"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on the importance of manifested union among believers, as prayed for by Jesus in John 17, emphasizing the visible unity and harmony that should exist among God's people to glorify the Father and testify to the world. While differences may exist, the underlying substantial union among the living family of God far outweighs them, resembling the unity within the human body despite external variations. Philpot challenges the current state of visible unity among believers, questioning if the churches truly exhibit the love and harmony that should mark them as followers of Christ, urging a deeper reflection on the manifested union among God's people.

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## Transcript

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The blessed Redeemer, in that most solemn and comprehensive intercessory prayer which he offered up, as the great High Priest over the house of God, on the eve of his sufferings and propitiatory sacrifice, besought of his heavenly Father that there might be manifested union among his immediate disciples--"Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one as we are." (John 17:11.) And not for his own peculiar disciples only, whom he was about to leave, did the blessed Lord intercede with his heavenly Father that they might be one as the Father and he are one, but his holy soul poured forth its interceding breath that the same blessing might be granted to all his future disciples--"Neither do I pray for these alone, but for those also, who shall believe on me, through their word; that they all may be one; as you Father are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:20, 21.)

We have used the words "manifested union" among his disciples, for it was not for abiding and invisible, but for evident and visible unity and harmony among his people that the Redeemer prayed. The former

already existed as a substantial reality, and could therefore neither be increased nor impaired. It was established in the heavens far above all the roaring winds and waves, the ebbing and flowing tides of this restless sea of time here below. In eternity, before all worlds, the members of Christ's mystical body were united to him by everlasting decree as their covenant Head; and therefore this union is necessarily unalterable and immutable--"Your eyes did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned when as yet there was none of them." (Ps.139:16.)

But not so with that manifested and visible union which, in a time state, cements together the members of the mystical body of Christ. That is subject to much fluctuation; that waxes and wanes, ebbs and flows, rises and sinks, according to the spiritual state of the members themselves, and the gracious operations of the Blessed Spirit on their hearts. The Lord, therefore, prayed to his heavenly Father that that secret and spiritual union might be manifestly visible; and that not only to the saints themselves, the blessed partakers of his grace and the destined heirs of his glory, but to the world itself in which they now live, and by which they are on every side surrounded.

But this could only be accomplished by certain clear and visible fruits and effects, which should stand forth as indubitable marks, and be possessed of sufficient weight and force to bear down prejudice and suspicion, and convince a selfish world that Christian love is not a name and pretense, but an undeniable reality. As the world cannot penetrate into the heart, and indeed has no eyes to see the work of the Spirit there, the inward union of the saints of God can only be made outwardly manifest by the harmony and concord which they display, the love and affection, the mutual sympathy and forbearance which they manifest, by the actions of Christian kindness and liberality which they show to each other under the most trying circumstances, by the tender regard which they display to one another's character, their consideration of each other's feelings, their generous interest in one another's welfare, by owning each other as brethren, by walking and associating together as such, and being separate from all others, however admired and esteemed.

By these visible fruits and effects, and by the whole tenor of their walk and conduct, as evidently springing from a deep-seated and ever-flowing fountain of love and affection to one another as partakers of his grace, his heavenly Father would be glorified, and the world would believe that he had sent him; for though he was no more on earth to be a pattern of love, he would leave a people upon it as his representatives, to manifest that he lived at the right hand of the Father, and sent his Spirit down to conform them, in all ages, to his own loving and lovely image.

But now compare the present state of things with this prayer of the blessed Redeemer, and with the fruits and effects of the union for which he prayed as we have thus faintly sketched them. Cast your eyes round in this or that direction, or fix them upon the churches of truth, as it is useless to look anywhere else, for if not found there, the union sought for will be found nowhere. Those who do not know the truth do not know the Lord, who is "the truth," as well as "the way and the life;" and most certainly those who do not profess the truth cannot know it, for "with the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Looking, then, at those who profess the truth, so far as they come within the sphere of our observation, and we are able to view their state and character with an impartial, unprejudiced eye, can we say that this unity is very bright, distinct, or clear? The lamentation of most good men, and the complaint of godly people generally, as far as our observation extends, would lead to the conclusion that it is not with the

churches now as it was with that of Thessalonica--"But as touching brotherly love you need not that I should write unto you; for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another." (1 Thess. 4:9.) The ancient exclamation of the heathen world was, "See how these Christians love one another." Does the world say so now, or is its exulting language, "See how these professors bite and devour one another?"

Has, then, the prayer of our great High Priest for manifested union among his believing disciples fallen to the ground? Was Jesus, whom the Father "hears always," (John 11:42,) unheard, unanswered in this one request, this most important, this most earnest petition of his holy heart and mouth? How can such a supposition be consistent with the words, "You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips," (Ps. 21:2) and many other passages of similar import? We must not admit, for a single moment, such a doubt to take possession of our minds. How can we, indeed, entertain such a thought in our bosom, if we have any regard for the Scriptures of truth, or any faith in the veracity of him who cannot lie? But the question still recurs--Is the oneness visible? Is there manifested union among the people of God? Are there not many divisions and disputes even among the true disciples of the Lord, the real followers of the Lamb? In gospel churches do peace and harmony generally prevail? Are there no secret heart-burnings and jealousies which too often break out in words and actions? Are even all the ministers of truth, the sent servants of God, united together in one unvaried tie of love and affection? These, from their very position, are leaders, and should be examples to the flock. In them, above all others, should this union be clearly manifest; and having a larger experience, for the most part, of trials and temptations, and being peculiarly exposed to the assaults of their unwearied foe, they seem more especially called upon to sympathize with one another, as well as to mutually comfort and encourage each other in the arduous work in which they are engaged.

Knowing the state of many churches, do not our words almost sound as irony, and rather as a description of things as they should be--rather than as they are? What then? Must we fall back on the same spot of unbelief and infidelity? Has the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ utterly fallen to the ground? and did the Father not hear the Son? (Heb. 5:7.) No! that cannot be. How, then, shall we explain the mystery, unravel the knotted coil, solve the difficult question? Thus.

There is a substantial union among the living family which underlies all differences. It is with the members of Christ's mystical body as with the members of our natural body. What a difference of form, feature, shape, and completion distinguishes individuals from one another! Where, out of the whole human race, can we find two people precisely alike? Yet how much greater their resemblance than their difference. Take man--any man, of any race, of any color--and place him by the side of an animal. How at once it is seen that an impassable gulf separates the lowest man from the highest animal; and that of any two men, taken at random from the wide-spread members of the human race, the greatest difference is but as nothing compared with the general resemblance. May we not apply this figure to the living family of God?

It is true that there are many differences among them, all which tend much to impair union, for "how can two walk together except they be agreed?" but these differences are as nothing compared with their points of resemblance--as spots on the face of the sun, which sensibly impair neither his light nor heat. The differences are visible, because they lie on the surface, as freckles and wrinkles are seen on the face, when bones, muscles, arteries, and nerves--the real stamina of the body, are unseen. The differences which exist among the Lord's people are for time, their agreement for eternity; their strife is but the fruit of the flesh, and will perish with the flesh, but their union is a fruit of the Spirit, and will last when the flesh is returned to its native dust.

Compare what you feel to a child of God, one really and truly manifested to your conscience, with what you feel to a worldling, to a Pharisee, to a dead professor. You must be sensible that if not perfectly united to him "in one mind and in one judgment," yet you agree with him far more than you differ, and that in all the grand fundamentals of truth, and in all that concerns vital godliness, you are one. You have a feeling, too, of love and union with him which you cannot, perhaps, define, but which is not the less real. But with the Pharisee, the worldling, the dead professor, you have not one point of union or agreement, and you feel that while they are what they are, you and they are separate, both for time and eternity.

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