

The Harmony of Christian Graces

by Thomas Reade

Thomas Reade's sermon explores the harmony of Christian graces and the necessity of unity within the Church for spiritual growth and strength.

Scripture: Jeremiah 32:39, Matthew 24:13, Mark 8:34, John 14:15, John 17:21, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:1, Hebrews 12:1, 1 John 4:7

Topics: "Christian Unity", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the harmony of Christian graces, emphasizing the unity and oneness of heart within the Church of God as described in the Scriptures. He highlights the importance of believers being humble, gentle, patient, and united in faith and practice to stand strong against the enemy's divisive tactics. Reade warns against the disfiguration of the Church through discord and urges for a return to the harmonious combination of spiritual graces. He encourages self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, prayer, obedience, and brotherly love as essential components of the Christian character, ultimately aiming for believers to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

21. THE HARMONY OF CHRISTIAN GRACES

"I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever." Jeremiah 32:39

When we contemplate the Church of God as described in the Holy Scriptures, we must be struck with that unity of principle, and that union of heart, which form its beauty and stability. Our Lord thus intercedes for his believing people; "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." This unity was beautifully exhibited by the church at Jerusalem; "They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity-- all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."

The apostolic exhortation enforces this oneness of faith and practice which would unite the Church of Christ, and make it a holy phalanx, against which the gates of hell could not prevail. "Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by

God. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace. We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all."

This lovely feature of the Christian Church was soon disfigured. Paul had to mourn over, and admonish many, whose minds were corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ- "And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people's faith by teaching things that are contrary to what you have been taught. Stay away from them. Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests. By smooth talk and glowing words they deceive innocent people." "Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your arguments, dear friends." "For you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord. When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians?"

Thus rapidly did tares spring up among the wheat. Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ if this work of the enemy had been confined to the primitive age; but alas! every age has exhibited his work of destruction. As union is strength, so the arch-enemy well knows, that disunion is weakness.

How glorious will that period be when the universal Church shall experience the fullness of the promise, "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me."

The graces of the Spirit harmonize and combine together. Like the links of a chain they mutually encircle and strengthen each other. How different are the vices of the human heart. They are, for the most part, discordant. Yet, while they appear to run in opposite directions, and in many cases to oppose each other, they all meet in one point- the destruction of the soul. What can be more opposed, in appearance at least, than the miser and the spendthrift, the libertine and the formalist, the man whose heart is full of the cares of life, rising early, and late taking rest that he may amass a fortune, and the man of pleasure who says to his soul- "Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Yet, these different vices all conspire the eternal ruin of the soul, and often reign, at different seasons, in the same breast. The libertine in youth often becomes covetous in old age; and the profane character, when wearied with licentious courses, sometimes assumes that of a religious devotee, hoping to atone for his past transgressions, and to merit a reward by a round of formal duties.

How desperately wicked is the human heart. Sin blinds the understanding and perverts the judgment. Men appear to be wise in every thing but religion. Here, they discover themselves to be very fools, and would be ashamed to act in temporal, as they do in spiritual things. What a convincing proof is this of the truth of Scripture, which declares, that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Oh! my soul, renounce your own imagined wisdom, righteousness, and strength, which in the sight of God is foolishness, guilt, and helplessness. Pray for grace to know yourself, and to receive the truths of the

gospel with the humility and simplicity of a child.

That delightful harmony which exists between the various graces of the Spirit is beautifully set forth in the word of God. Blessed is that soul in which the graces of faith, hope, and love; meekness, humility, and patience; self-denial, long-suffering, and resignation, dwell and flourish. Lord create my heart anew, and make it your dwelling-place.

It is important to consider every precept in the Bible, as forming a part of the Christian character. The true believer in Jesus is not presented to us in one entire figure, in any portion of the Holy Scriptures, but the lineaments of it may be traced throughout the sacred volume, as drawn by the pencil of Eternal Truth.

Thus, "To this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word." Contrition and poverty of spirit form a part of the believer's character.

"Always be zealous for the fear of the Lord." The fear of God is another part of this holy character.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." Love to God is also an essential part of it.

And so with every promise to which peculiar dispositions are attached. The blessings promised to the poor in spirit; to those who mourn; to the meek; to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; to the merciful; to the pure in heart; to the peacemakers; to them who suffer for righteousness' sake, are so many blessings promised to those who have the character of a child of God. The Bible, when read with this view of discovering the full length portrait of the real Christian, affords abundant matter for daily self-examination; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." "If you love me, keep my commandments." "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." Thus, self-denial, watchfulness, a prayerful spirit, obedience, and brotherly love, form so many component parts of the Christian character.

Oh! blessed Spirit of truth and love draw these sacred lines upon my soul, that I may become more and more like Jesus, in the whole frame and disposition of my heart. Fill me with every gracious affection. Subdue every evil, selfish principle and passion, and cause me to grow and abound in all the fruits of righteousness. Lord, renew my soul, and make me a monument of your grace.

Who can study the Bible with prayer to understand it aright, and not be convinced that all true religion is seated in the heart? Truly to love the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the essence of Gospel holiness, and the perfection of the Christian character. If I love the Savior in sincerity, my will must be molded into his, and all my powers become subservient to his glory. The influence of this divine principle will operate on every thought, word, and action. When it does not so operate, it is because this principle has grown weaker, or is opposed by some strongly counteracting evil in my heart. This evil is unbelief, pride, the lust of the flesh, and the love of the world. As this evil predominates, so is the man.

If it reigns in his heart, he is carnal, and under the wrath of God; if it only rebels, and is not allowed to rule, it marks a character renewed by the Spirit of Grace, struggling with those remnants of corruption which will never cease to harass the believer until death ends the warfare, and place the victorious Christian

"Where sin and flesh no more control

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

But, the very circumstance of this evil still dwelling within us, calls forth the graces of watchfulness and prayer. There is no period in the Christian life when watchfulness and prayer become unnecessary. Where can a passage be found, from Genesis to the Revelation, which countenances relaxation in duty, or a freedom from the exercise of vigilance and circumspection? The Bible, on the contrary, is full of exhortations, admonitions, and warnings; declaring that he only who endures unto the end shall be saved; that if any man looks back, God will have no pleasure in him; that he that overcomes shall inherit all things; and that to him who is faithful unto death, Christ will give the crown of life.

How sweet is a life of faith. Oh! that I could live such a life. It brings along with it holiness and happiness. God, who is the Author of it, is glorified by it, and the good of mankind in general is eminently promoted. A true believer in Jesus loves his Lord and Master; he esteems that day as lost which is not devoted to his service; he deems no sacrifice too great for him, who gave himself a sacrifice for sin; all his mental powers are exercised in the cause of his Redeemer, and when he hears of any good being done, through his feeble instrumentality, he rejoices, and gives God the glory.

Lord enable me thus to feel, thus to act, and thus to live. Undertake for me, that, through your over-ruling Providence, I may become a humble instrument in your hands, of promoting the spread of genuine religion. Shed abroad your love in my heart. Reign the Sovereign of my affections. Make me vigilant and prayerful. Preserve me from unbelief and pride, sensuality and covetousness. Keep my feet in your paths, and bring me to the kingdom of your dear Son, there to employ my perfected powers in loving, serving, and adoring you through the blissful ages of eternity.

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