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THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

SERMON preached at Union Chapel, Bethersden, on the 28th June, 1964.
by the Pastor, Mr. H. Dawson.

TEXT: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3.

This is a word which the Apostle Paul was inspired of God to pen to the godly Ephesians long ago, and it is what is called an exhortation. Exhortations in the Gospel are always made to sinners born again; remember that. First of all, the sinner is regenerated, as you read concerning these godly Ephesians: "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins," and then, being made alive in things divine, exhortations come home to sinners born again; and they set forth that which God looks upon them to be doing as they journey on through life, and He has guaranteed them help from above to do it. It would be well that in all to whom these exhortations are addressed there should be an exercise unto godliness to reduce them to practice. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." I want to look at the subject, as grace is given, from two or three viewpoints of it; but I would look first of all at the setting of it as it related to the godly Ephesians. You all know, if you read the Word of God, as you ought to do, somewhat of the history of the Church of Christ at Ephesus, and how the Apostle Paul in his missionary journeyings arrived there, and searched around the city, and found at length a small church with just twelve members making up the membership. Who founded that church & the Church's Living Head alone knows, but there was a church there, and yet those in that membership were not well instructed in the things of God. The Apostle Paul, desiring to do them good, said: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?", and the answer is surprising: "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." Now the Apostle Paul did not immediately begin to be critical, and

cut them down, and condemn them for what seemed to be amazing ignorance, but he was inspired of God, and he led them on into the truth, and instructed them in doctrine, and they were brought along in the things of God to a deeper establishment in the truth. The Apostle Paul was constrained to abide there, and preach the Gospel, and there was great success attending his ministry, and the Church of Christ grew, and was enlarged. You will remember there was the riot in the Ephesus marketplace when there was great opposition to Paul's ministry, and for two hours the multitude cried out: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," and cried themselves hoarse. Some while afterwards, the Apostle Paul having gone on his way to preach the Gospel elsewhere, and being at Rome, "The prisoner of the Lord," he is constrained to pen the Epistle to the Ephesians, and what does he say? I have already quoted it: "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Some of those in the Ephesus marketplace were in the Church, and here he is addressing them as godly Ephesians, and he is beseeching them that they shall reduce to practice what they know of the things of God. Every man ordained of God to preach will always be harping, as it were, on that string:

"Hoard up the Sacred Word,
And feed thereon and grow;
Go on to seek to know the Lord,
And practice what you know."

It must be reduced to practice, dear friends, it must be evidenced in our lips and life; "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." It is very striking how the Apostle Paul's ministry was owned of God at Ephesus, for it states in the Acts of the Apostles in the record of it: "And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also that used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men. And they counted the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver, so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed." What great days they were in the days of the Acts of the Apostles: O, that the Spirit of God could be poured out again upon us in our degenerate days, and that preacher and people alike might live to see such times come again. I would

look, first of all, at the "Unity of the Spirit." It is a very striking expression, and what I like about it, speaking with great reverence, is that it overrides all denominational labels whatever, and it brings all people taught of God into a gracious oneness on the foundation that God has laid in Zion, irrespective of any difference there might be as regards church order. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all." "The unity of the Spirit." The Spirit of God, wherever His operations are known and felt by any poor sinner, will unite that same sinner with all other poor sinners who are the subject of the same operation in all essential things to do with the salvation of our souls: "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus;" and there must be an endeavouring to maintain that unity of the Spirit, however much you may not see eye to eye in other things which are not so important to do with church order. Looking at the context you will observe how concerned the Apostle Paul was regarding how these godly Ephesians should walk: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It might profit you, and it might also surprise you, if I just run through this Epistle with five or six references to what the Apostle Paul has to say, as to how these godly Ephesians were to walk; and that means how you are to walk if you are a sinner born again. He says here: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience," and now that is how you and I walked before we were born again; we walked with the world, being in the world and of it; and we had no concern whatever to walk with God, or, if we did, we buried it in being more than ever in the world, so that it should not rise up to trouble us

and disturb our minds. We just walked "After the flesh, the things of the flesh." Some of you may be still living such a life, "walking according to the course of this world," and our concern is that God would do for you what we hope He has done for us in making us to differ from the world at large; whether at the present time you feel to want it, or no: our hearts go up to God that He will at length grant you that inestimable mercy that you shall know the privilege and pleasure of what it is to walk with God, - walk in sweet agreement with Him as the sinner's Friend. The Apostle Paul says again: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained (margin, prepared) that we should walk in them." Walk in good works, bearing fruit, as I said:

"When on the bough rich fruit we see,
'Tis then we cry "A goodly tree."

And here he says: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called;" and then he says again: "Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds." Then he says again: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour;" and then he says again: "Walk as children of light." and his concluding word on walking is: "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." We might call that an Ephesian walk, and it will do you good to look it up, and consider it prayerfully, and seek divine aid to walk in accordance with the pattern set forth to these godly Ephesians.

Coming now to the "Unity of the Spirit." I have said it is an exhortation to sinners born again, and it is a great mercy to be a sinner born again. If you are, you will find in your heart a concern to heed what the Word of God says as to how you should be living: not only so, you will feel welling up in your breast the spirit of prayer that you might get help from God to live according

to the pattern laid down in the Word of His grace.

"Make me to walk in Thy commands,
 'Tis a delightful road;
 Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
 Offend against my God."

First of all, looking at the unity of the Spirit, what it really is - it must be a Unity of Knowledge, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." This unity of the Spirit must be a unity of knowledge, and it is knowledge that is essential, the knowledge of God. By nature, as you and I came into the world, we were altogether ignorant of God and godliness, and we had no concern whatever to be the subject of a knowledge of God. Our attitude was: "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thee, or Thy ways;" but, when the Spirit begins to work in a sinner's breast, and he is born again, he begins to follow on to know the Lord, and he comes into this unity of the Spirit; and as he hears those who are taught by the Spirit of God setting forth the things of God, as they have known the same in their soul's experience, it touches a chord in his own soul's experience. At times it may be that the one to whom he is listening goes deeper down, and climbs higher up in the things of God than he can as yet enter into, but it is very attractive to him; it is just the religion he desires to be the subject of; it is the Spirit's operation; it is like fire ascending, seeking the sun. How good it is to remember: "They shall all know Me, from the least of them, to the greatest of them," - what do you think that really means? It does not mean from the least sinners to the greatest sinners: no, it is to do with age, the least: "Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish," - "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained praise." Some who are in life's early morning have been led into the truth to an amazing degree, and fitted for the skies, and gone to heaven, and were cut down because the Word of God says: "Then putteth He in the sickle because the harvest is ripe." It is just amazing how

some children have been ripened for glory, and how they have been led into the truth, and taught the reality of it, and made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." God has guaranteed: "They shall all know Me, from the least of them," and even down to old age. "When He, the Spirit of truth is come, He shall convince the world of sin," "He shall guide you into all truth," all essential truth, truth to issue in the salvation of the soul, and so this unity of the Spirit must be first of all a unity of knowledge, a knowledge of God with Whom you have to do, and it will be a unity of knowledge of what you are by nature. O, when the eyes of the blind are opened, and you begin to realise the plague of the heart - the Word of God says in Solomon's prayer: "Which shall know every man the plague of his own heart," - you will find whoever you come in touch with one who is taught of God, he or she will feel just the same as you do. Each one will realise: "From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it, wounds and bruises and putrifying sores;" each one in his approaches to God must inevitably confess: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." There is a wondrous unity of the Spirit known and felt when poor sinners are before the throne of grace, and confessing their sins; how often you have felt when listening to the public prayers in your heart there has been a response, and you have said 'Amen'; confessions have been made, petitions have been offered, and it has touched a chord in your own soul's experience, and you have found: "As in water face answereth unto face, so does the heart of man to man."

"Though sundered far, by faith we meet,
Around a common mercy seat;"

and you find that revealed in the Word of God when you search the sacred pages, especially when you look through the Psalms, for there you see petitions which you are glad to use on your own initiative on your own behalf. You have said many a time with David: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour Thou bearest unto Thy people, O visit me with Thy salvation;" and how often you have said: "Leave not my soul destitute," margin reading: "Make not my soul bare." Yes, and sometimes you have said: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all

His benefits;" and sometimes you have said: "Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me." You have said too: "Show me now Thy way." Much might be said about the unity of the Spirit as it is known before the throne of grace. "The Unity of the Spirit," it will be a Unity of Aim. Ask any sinner born again what he is aiming at in his soul's desires, and you will find that he means just the same in what he is aiming at as you do. He will say something like this: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection; the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to His death;" - "That I may win Christ, and be found in Him." He will say:-

"Jesus is the one thing needful,
I, without Him, perish must;
Gracious Spirit, make me heedful,
Help me in His name to trust;
And with pleasure,
In Him as my portion boast."

"The unity of the Spirit" is a unity of Aim. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." O, you find when you get in touch with these people, wherever you get in touch with them, whoever they are, they want matters right between their souls and God, at whatever cost it is for it to be brought about. Much might be said under that heading. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit," and you want to keep a unity of aim: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you," the Saviour says, and you do want to live like that.

"Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care."

"The unity of the Spirit" must inevitably be a Unity of Faith. I do not mean faith within you, whereby you are made a believer; I mean the things of God known and felt as sound doctrine, what is called "Our most holy faith," of which Jude says: "Ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." You will find all who are taught of God have a Unity in Doctrine, and that doctrine is the doctrine of grace. Do remember that, and it

will help you, especially you dear young people. You will not be turned aside into bypaths, or go after "Lo here," and "Lo there," if you endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit, for you will be brought down on to the one foundation God has laid in Zion, and you will know sound doctrine, and that it is the doctrine of grace. Do mark that word (I have told you that before, but I must tell you again) it is doctrine; you should not use the expression doctrines (plural) "doctrines of grace" the Word of God does not do it, but says 'doctrine, it is all-inclusive in doctrine. "My doctrine," said Jesus, "is not mine, but His Who sent Me," the doctrine of grace. "Doctrines" (plural) is in the Word of God as "doctrines of devils." And what is the doctrine of grace? "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." What is the doctrine of grace? "Salvation is of the Lord." What is the doctrine of grace? "Neither is there salvation in any other, there is given under heaven among men none other Name whereby we can be saved." "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." You will want to be a follower of them "Who through faith and patience inherit the promises," and, remember, all who have gone to heaven have gone there in the unity of the Spirit, in the unity of the faith. Each one, every one has been taught of God, and down till time shall be no more, the Word of God says: "They shall be all taught of God," and God never varies His teaching. It is set forth in the Word of God in a sure pattern, and it is a great mercy to be the subject of it - a wonderful mercy to have some evidence that one is taught of God; and, remember, if you are, it will mean that you take root downward and bear fruit upward. You will take root downward in the knowledge of what you are by nature, the malady of sin, and learn very painfully that the leprosy lies deep within, but you will also bear fruit upward; and that fruit can be summed up like this - you will never have any more religion than this, and may God grant you the mercy to have as much:-

"A guilty, weak and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall;
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus, and my all."

There is a unity in doctrine, unity in the faith. O, says the poor sinner:-

"If ever my poor soul is saved,
'Tis Christ must be the way."

"I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

This unity of the Spirit will be a Unity in Worship, and yet you will think that varied denominations have their own forms of worship, that is as to their order, but as to the reality of worship there is only one worship that is acceptable to God, and that flows from the unity of the Spirit: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth: For the Father seeketh such to worship Him;" and that worship overrides whatever the church order may be; it is that which goes on between your soul and God; do remember that. Very sweet it is to worship God aright, and sometimes the house of prayer in public worship becomes "The house of God, and the gate of heaven;" and you can say: "Lord, it is good for us to be here." When you feel like that, you feel not only that matters are right between your soul and God, but with everybody else with whom you have to do; you can love them as brethren, and let brotherly love continue. If need arises, you can confess your faults one to another, and come into that beautiful petition: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." It is wonderful to worship God aright, and to feel you can rise above the world, and ascend into heavenly places with Christ Jesus. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

There will be the unity of the Spirit in an exercise unto godliness. You find that all who are taught of God, as they journey on through life, want to live the same kind of life, "And run with patience the race set before them, looking unto Jesus," and looking off all beside. There is a unity of the Spirit in an exercise unto godliness that when you hear one giving his exercises in words before God:-

"When trouble, like a gloomy cloud,
Gathers thick and thunders loud:"

you feel the unity of the Spirit in that which he desires, when he pleads that he may behave aright before God, with Whom he has to do, especially in humbling himself under the mighty hand of God in His dealings with him, and not to be left to be rebellious, cantankerous, irritable, and fretful and murmuring. You feel the unity of the Spirit with a poor sinner who says before God:-

"Let but my fainting heart be blessed
With Thy sweet Spirit for its Guest;
O God, to Thee I leave the rest,
Thy will be done."

There is this unity of the Spirit in an exercise unto godliness, and O, that you and I might know more about it - exercise unto godliness! Do you say 'Amen' to that? I hope you do, but I must warn you, if you really do mean it, if you would have that wondrous unity of the Spirit that flows from an exercise unto godliness, you must look for something like this in your life:-

"Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials add new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to Christ's feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there."

It is a great thing to be exercised unto godliness, and if you have the Spirit's operations known and felt within, you will sometimes have a very solemn dread of being left to be in an unexercised state, and to be of the earth, earthly, for that brings home to you that "To be carnally minded in death." What you want to know more about is that "To be spiritually minded is life and peace." "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

I might say there is the unity of the Spirit in the prayers that are offered up, because you find as you draw near to God, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth can speak, and in the confessions which are made there is the unity of the Spirit known and felt, and this unity will not only be a unity in prayer, but I might add in praise. It is good to remember: "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." The unity of the Spirit is known

when one can feelingly take up the hymn-writer's language:-

"O bless the Lord, my soul!
Let all within me join,
And aid my tongue to bless His Name
Whose favours are divine."

O bless the Lord, my soul!
Nor let His mercies lie
Forgotten in unthankfulness,
And without praises die."

It will be a Unity in Spiritual Joy, and there is spiritual joy to be known and felt. I think it might surprise you if you like to look it up (and you can do when you have got leisure to do it) if you look up the references to joy which should be known and felt by people taught of God. I fear it is very little known nowadays, but "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy" - and there is a joy wherein "the joy of the Lord is your strength," it is a blessed experience. What gives you joy - spiritual joy? "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord," and sometimes you get this feeling, too: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem." What joy it gives when you can say like Hannah: "For this child I prayed," and his name is Samuel, "asked of God." There is the joy that you have at times when you can say: "The watchmen that go about the city, they found me," and then you know: "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." Much could be said about this spiritual joy. O that you and I might know more of it in our soul's experience, for that is positive in its nature. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

Then we must look at this word 'endeavouring,' and I said it is an exhortation. It means that you should always seek to accept people taught of God for what you know they really are, and not what you may see sometimes they are by nature, which disturbs you, and might even wound and grieve you. If you should know that line of things in every day life, you are to look above it, and beyond it, and endeavour to receive them as brothers and

sisters in the Lord, and still pray one for another: "Endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit," following after the things that make for peace. Very striking are the references to peace in the Word of God: "Seek peace and pursue it." "Following after the things that make for peace," I have just quoted; the suggestion is that peace is not very easily obtainable, but there must be an endeavour to obtain it, and to remember "It is that which a man cannot receive, except it be given him from heaven," but you must "Seek peace, and pursue it." "Be at peace among yourselves," the Word of God says, and that is what the Apostle Paul was aiming at with these godly Ephesians, because, when all is said and done, they must have been a very rough and ready lot in the Ephesus marketplace; and they were not very old in the things of God, and yet they were wonderfully well taught, for the age they really were in the things of God. Some of the deepest things of God are in this epistle to the Ephesians, and, although I have been trying to preach for fifty years and more, there are one or two Scriptures in Chapter one in this Epistle to the Ephesians that I should tremble to take to preach from, unless I was actually inspired of God to do it, because it is such a deep that coucheth beneath; I should have to do it if God laid it on my mind, and He would give the grace, but I would never do it otherwise; yet these godly Ephesians must have entered into it by the grace that was given when the Epistle was sent, because the Spirit of God would not inspire the Apostle Paul to record what the Ephesians could not understand; do remember that. Endeavouring, the meaning is you must be prepared to make a sacrifice to do it; you must remember at times it will cost you something to do it; you must be willing to bear reproach in doing it. Endeavouring: it means you must keep right away from that class of people who can only live their lives according to this word: "Report, say they, and we will report it." The unity of the Spirit will not allow you to have any unity with such folks, but the unity of the Spirit will bring you into a Scripture like this: "These are the things which ye shall do, amend your ways and your doings, and speak ye every man

the truth to his neighbour. If it should be otherwise, then there will be a rebuke: "Is this the Spirit of the Lord, are these His doings? Do not my words do good to them that walk uprightly?" "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Do remember this, you dear young people especially, this unity of the Spirit is not only to do nowadays with those whom you may know, and esteem and love, because of what you believe them to be, people who are taught of God; it stretches right back through the ages of the past, so that the unity of the Spirit sometimes brings you to have unity with Abraham. Have you ever felt it? "Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes;" if you have felt like that, it unites you to Abraham, when he felt like it thousands of years ago. Think of Jacob when he said: "Few and evil have the days of my life been," as he stood before Pharoah; and then on his dying bed when he said: "God, Who hath fed me all my life long, the Angel which hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." Has this ever struck a chord in your heart as you have read it, and you have felt the unity of the Spirit with Jacob? So it is with Job; when he said: "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause;" and when he said: "The root of the matter is found in me," you have said: "Job, I hope I have got that root in me also;" and so you have felt the unity of the Spirit, and you can go on through the Psalms, and then you feel it also with Isaiah when he said: "Woe is me, for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips," and you go on with Jeremiah with what he had to say, and especially in his Lamentations you will feel the unity of the Spirit. You will feel it when you can say: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope: It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because His compassions fail not." So it runs right through the Word of God, and when you read the memoirs of the godly, autobiographies of those who have lived and died long years ago, as they tell out the dealings of God with their souls, you will find it reflects somewhat of His dealings with you, and you will feel the unity of the Spirit, and yet their

redeemed spirits are in the realms of Bliss, and all that is mortal of them has gone back "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust," awaiting the resurrection morn when the dead in Christ shall rise first. "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Many a time will you feel it as you ponder these things in your heart as you look at the people of God, and how it is with them as they journey on through life, and well when called to die. You will say:-

"With them numbered I would be,
Now and in eternity."

"Let me amongst Thy saints be found,"
there is the unity of the Spirit.

"Love is the golden chain that binds
The favoured souls above;
And he's an heir of heaven who finds
His bosom glow with love."

Let every seeking soul remember also -

"The soul that with sincere desires,
Seeks after Jesus' love,
That soul the Holy Ghost inspires
With breathings from above."

Amen.