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CIRCULAR LETTER.

TO THE CHURCHES COMPOSING THE WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION.

Dear Brethren,

The apostle Paul, exhorts us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How needful this exhortation! At the commencement of the Christian church, we are told, "the multitude of them that believed, were of one heart and one soul; neither said any one that ought which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common." How different from this has been the state of the Christian church, for the most part ever since! At the present moment, the church of Christ is divided into sections, between which there is often the most bitter hostility.

But to confine our attention at present to those congregations which have their government in their own hands, it is a well known fact that among them there is great want of the unity of the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. In such congregations are often witnessed, a spirit of pride, jealousy, envy, resentment, malice, and contention. The Holy Spirit knew how much of human depravity would exist among the followers of Jesus, and, therefore gave the important precept, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The apostle states both the means and the motives which should lead to unity of the Spirit. He says "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Here is the road to union among Christians.

The first of the series is "with all lowliness," the very reverse of pride. It is plainly implied when lowliness is inculcated, as essential to unity, that pride leads to disunion. Not only is it taught in the Bible, but any one who has lived any length of time in the world, will see that pride more than any thing else leads to contention and strife. In the church of Christ—it is a principal source of contention, strife, hatred, and disunion. It has often torn congregations to pieces—and alienated those, who should have been united in the bond of perfection. In the world, pride produces daily strife, hatred, and division; leads to national wars—and pours out human blood like water. It has placed the Man of Sin on his throne;—led him to lord it over the Christian church, and to assume a superiority over kings;—and even to take the titles and honours of Deity.

How different is all this from that lowliness which is essential to unity! The Saviour gave a most striking example of humility when he left the throne of his glory, and took our place on Calvary. He set a child in the midst of his disciples, and said, Except ye be converted, and become as little children—ye shall not enter the kingdom of God." He taught that whosoever would be chief among his followers, must be servant of all. Paul, in treating of the same subject, exhorts his brethren to esteem others better than themselves. It is easy to see that such a spirit and such conduct would go far to produce a unity of spirit among Christians.

The next characteristic inculcated by the apostle as necessary to union, is meekness. This involves great command of our temper, so as not to be easily provoked or irritated. Causes of provocation will arise. We are so constituted that it seems impossible under present circumstances, that it can be altogether avoided. It is no less evident that offence is often taken where none is intended. In all such cases, the prescription of the apostle,—meekness—will be found to be the remedy needed. Trifles and imaginary causes of offence will be given to the wind, and the unity of the Spirit be maintained.

The next part of the means necessary to unity, prescribed by the apostle is "longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Numerous peculiarities distinguish individuals. No two faces are alike; and no two human beings are precisely similar. We are distinguished by difference of sentiment, of disposition and manner. Some of our peculiarities are natural, others are the result of education of disposition and of habit. Some of these peculiarities, may not be agreeable to others. In such cases the remedy is "long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." "Charity or love covereth a multitude of sins." "Charity suffereth long and is kind." "Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things; endureth all things." If charity or love is in operation, then forbearance with one another, will be easy and readily practised. It is very obvious that love will contribute largely to promote the unity of the Spirit.

The apostle next specifies the motive which should unite Christians. It is that they are one and that too in a variety of particulars. He says "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in 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." Here

we see the people of God are one to a great extent in spite of the disunion to which their remaining pride, irritability and intolerance, may lead. The particulars of union here specified are of such a kind, that they cannot be contemplated by Christians without drawing them together.

The argument, employed by the apostle to lead Christians to unity, operates strongly in the world, in securing the common good. The attachment existing between members of the same family is often evinced by sympathy in trouble, and by contributing to each other's welfare. In the same way, under certain circumstances, the fact, that persons are the natives of the same city, the same province, or the same country, has a strong influence in calling forth attachment, especially when meeting on a foreign shore, in the midst of strangers. So also but in a much higher degree, the thought of the close and deeply interesting connection of the people of God, is calculated powerfully to draw them together, and unite them in the perfect bond of love.

The first particular, in the bond of union specified by the apostle, is, that "there is one body." Christians are the members, and Christ is the head. All our members constitute but one body. "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the foot, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members which seem to be more feeble are necessary. And those members which we may think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked; that there might be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one of another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." Nothing could illustrate more forcibly the close connection subsisting among the people of God. In the human body there is no jarring, no opposition of one member to another; their troubles and their joys are one. How desirable that the same unity should be maintained in the church of God!

The next item in the bond of union is, "there is one Spirit." As the human body is actuated by one soul, so the body of Christ is actuated by one Spirit. That spirit is one of love and peace. Were Christians always actuated by his heavenly influence, nothing, of an opposite nature, could ever occur among them. When, therefore, jarings take place, it is evident some other spirit is at work among them.

Again it is said, "even as ye are called in one hope of your calling,"—there is one heaven. Here is a consideration certainly fitted in a high degree to produce unity. Christians have the prospect of being united forever before the throne of God. They are now fellow-travellers, walking side by side to the heavenly Jerusalem; and there with the great multitude which no man can number, they shall be united while eternity endures. The union of the people of God before the eternal throne will be under circumstances of the happiest kind. There the one spirit, the Spirit of God, will regulate every thought, feeling and movement of every individual; there the only experience of the innumerable company, will be unmingled and exalted happiness; there they shall gaze on the Divine glory, enjoy the personal presence of the Redeemer, and mingle familiarly with angels and archangels. Such a prospect is surely calculated to lead Christians to forbear one another in love, and to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It is said further, there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." The Lord Jesus Christ is our lawgiver,—the sole King and Head of his church. Under Him all Christians are placed. He gives them protection and guidance, and to him they must submit. There is "one faith." The mode by which the followers of Jesus are admitted to the enjoyment of all their privileges and blessings, is by faith, that it may be by grace. There is "one baptism." In baptism, as appointed by our Lord, believers are required to profess their faith in Him, and thus be introduced into the Christian church. In this ordinance one Lord and one faith are publicly professed, and the fundamental blessings of the gospel are represented to the church and the world. The fact that Christians are one in so many particulars, should draw them together in the closest bonds and make them feel that they are indeed one.

Finally, "there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." All are the creatures of his hand. He is through all in his adorable providence. He numbers the hairs of our heads. The sparrow does not fall to the ground without him. Every change we experience, the blessings we receive, the afflictions we endure, all are from His hand.

Christians are one in a variety of very important particulars, in spite of all the wrangling and jarring which may take place among them. But certainly nothing can be more unseemly among persons so connected than disunion. The thought of their close and deeply interesting connection, formed by so many links, ought to operate, everywhere and at all times, with great power, in leading them to suffer long, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

David has left no sweeter Psalm than the short twenty-third. It is but a moment's opening of his soul; but—as when one, walking the winter street, sees the door opened for some one to enter, and the red light streams a moment forth, and the forms of gay children are running to greet the comer, and genial music sounds, though the door shuts and leaves the night black, yet it cannot shut back again all that the eye, and ear, the heart, and the imagination have seen—so in this psalm, though it is but a moment's opening of the soul, are emitted truths of peace and consolation that will never be absent from the world.

The twenty-third psalm is the nightingale of the psalms. It is small, of a homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but oh, it has filled the air of the whole world with melodious joy, greater than the heart can conceive! Blessed be the day on which that psalm was born!

What would you say of a pilgrim commissioned of God to travel up and down the earth singing a strange melody, which, when one heard, caused him to forget whatever sorrow he had? And so the singing angel goes on his way through all lands, singing in the language of every nation, driving away trouble by the pulses of the air when his tongue moves with divine power. Behold just such an one! This pilgrim God has sent to speak in every language on the globe. It has charmed more gifts to rest than all the philosophy of the world. It has remanded to their dungeon more felon thoughts, more black doubts, more thieving sorrows, than there are sands on the sea shore. It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their pinching griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prison and broken his chains, and, like Peter's angel, led him forth in imagination, and sung him him back to his home again. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master, and consoled those whom, dying, he left behind mourning not so much that he was gone, as because they were left behind, and could not go too. Nor is its work done. It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time; nor will it fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which make heaven musical for ever.—Henry Ward Beecher.

THE HASTY WOMAN.

- I. How common! Yet the Bible commands us not to be hasty: *Eccles. 7: 9.*
A woman's ornament should be a meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3: 4); and a nurse is mentioned as being especially gentle to the little one. 1 *Thess. 2: 7.*
- II. Observe the angry woman.
How foolish! *Prov. 14: 29, 24: 20.*
How provoking! *Prov. 15: 1.*
How wearing! *Prov. 19: 13, 27: 15, 21: 19.*
Drives the husband from the fireside; sets an evil example to the children.
Often does in her haste what she heartily repents at leisure.
- III. Therefore—
Put away anger. *Eph. 9: 31.*
Do not be soon angry. *Prov. 14: 17; James 1: 19.*
Meekness gives smooth answers to rough questions.
2. Excise self-control. *Prov. 35: 28, 16: 32.*
3. Teach it to your children.
- IV. Remember a hasty temper is a fault, not a misfortune.
Accustom yourself and your children to view it in its right light.
- V. Ask help from God to subdue it, for temper is hard to conquer, and meekness is a fruit of the Spirit. *Gal. 5: 22, Matt. 5: 5.*
You need help, for there is much to provoke a wife and mother.
You need help, for you are very weak; but you can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you. *Phil. 4: 13.*

"I AM NOT WORTHY."

Mrs. E— was a woman of warm and ardent piety. When she found her husband was trusting in his morality instead of Christ for salvation, her anxiety and distress were great. With strong crying and tears she pleaded with God to bring him to a saving knowledge of the truth. Year after year did she continue to plead with Him who has promised to hear the cry of his children.
In a season of the outpouring of the Spirit of God, Mr. E— accompanied his wife to the meetings for some time with seeming indifference. At length he refused to go, saying with great bitterness, "There is no use in going to meeting, and I have been enough." The enmity of his heart rose in opposition to the claims of God, and the cross of Christ was an offence to him.