

Part Thirteen

THE FINAL WEEK

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THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF THE KING

The accounts of the last week and resurrection occupy just about one-third of the total pages of the four Gospel accounts as a whole. Matthew gives more than one-third of his gospel record to the story of the last week and the resurrection. Doesn't this show that the Holy Spirit and the apostles attached greatest importance to this part of Jesus' ministry? The lessons of the final week deserve special study and special emphasis!

This kingly entry of Jesus into Jerusalem as the dramatic opening of the last week is reported rather fully in all four Gospels, and each adds some significant details to the record. See Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 11:55—12:19.

Jerusalem, a compact and populous city, was normally what we would consider very crowded. Now it was certainly crowded with Jews from every province and from many countries who had come for the Passover, the chief religious festival of the year.

Excitement and Expectancy of the People

The people from the provinces knew Jesus, not only from His preaching and miracles which He had done among them in their villages, but also from His prominence at former feasts. At the Passover three years before, He had cleansed the temple (John 2:13-23). At the Passover two years before, He had been persecuted for Sabbath-breaking, and the Jews had sought to kill Him, even then, for "making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). At the feast of the tabernacles, six or seven months before, He had been a center of subdued excitement even before He appeared (John 7:11-13, 30, 32, 43-48). His continued ministry in Judea at that time only continued and increased the tension between Him and His enemies, as well as between the people themselves, who were sharply divided in opinion concerning Him (John 8:37, 40-45, 59; 9:16, 17; 10:19-21). At the feast of dedication, about four months before, they had taken up stones to stone Him (John 10:31). On all of these occasions Jesus had made some disciples.

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY OF THE KING

Since the feast of dedication, Jesus had stayed in out-of-the-way sections of the country, except for one trip and master miracle, when He raised Lazarus from the dead at Bethany, less than two miles from Jerusalem. That mighty work was done in the presence of a multitude, and was so great in its effect upon the people that the rulers sought to kill both Lazarus and Jesus (John 11:45-53; 12:10). The priests and Pharisees had formally decided that Jesus must be put to death, and had given a public order that any one knowing Jesus' whereabouts should reveal it that they might take Him to destroy Him (John 11:53, 57).

It is understandable, then, that the crowds who came early to purify themselves for the Passover excitedly speculated whether Jesus would appear at the feast. They were curious regarding the outcome of the conflict between the rulers and Jesus. Yes, Jesus was coming, causing fear and amazement to His disciples as they observed the determined set of His face and His calm expectation of death as He walked straight into such danger (Mark 10:32). As He came into the highways and towns teeming with people going to the feast, the multitudes thronged about Him for healing, for pardon, and for teaching (Luke 18:35-43; 19:1-28).

Now just use your imagination to picture how things developed. Jesus came in to Bethany "six days before the passover" (John 12:1), which would seem to be Saturday, the Sabbath. A tradition of the Pharisees limited Sabbath travel to about seven-eighths of a mile, but there is no indication that Jesus ever kept the tradition. However, this could well have been Friday evening that He arrived at Bethany and stayed in the house of Lazarus and his sisters over the Sabbath (John 12:1-8). Common people came to see Him, and to see Lazarus, who had been dead, but was raised by Jesus.

Then the next day "a great multitude" heard that He was coming forth into the city, and Jesus, knowing all these things, took advantage of the time and made the arrangement Matthew describes about obtaining the ass's colt that had never been ridden (Matt. 21:1-7). In solemn dignity He rode into the city as a king in triumphal possession as if to claim the city for His own.

Why Did Jesus Enter the City Thus?

Matthew says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet" (Matt. 21:4). This same manner of speech must often be understood to mean "with the result that it was fulfilled." The prophecy was given because the event was to take place. The event

did not take place just because of the prophecy. Solomon had announced his taking over the kingdom of David in this manner (I Kings 1:32-40). Zechariah had prophesied that thus the great Messiah King should come (Zech. 9:9, 10). "People . . . took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (John 12:12, 13). "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way" (Matt. 21:8 K.J.V.).

This entry into the city by Jesus constituted His one public and dramatic claim to be the Christ. The Jews' expectations of the Messiah's work were so thoroughly political and militaristic that Jesus had avoided claiming openly that He was the Christ (Matt. 16:20; Luke 4:41; Mark 8:30). He had preached Himself as sent from heaven, the Son of God, Judge of the world, Shepherd of God's people, Light of the world, etc. He had spoken of the kingdom in such ways as to imply that He was the King, but He had never acted as they expected a king to act, and He even resolutely refused to be made a king. Such actions caused even John the Baptist to question Him, whether He were the "one that cometh" (Matt. 11:3). The Jews who considered Jesus more or less favorably were continually in uncertainty whether He was the Christ (John 7:26, 27, 31, 41; 8:53; 10:24). Note the perplexity of His own brethren about His claims and conduct (John 7:4). Jesus knew that the Jews of this generation were ready to revolt violently against Rome under the leadership of anybody they could get to be a "Christ." He had avoided revolution, and until this last week He had avoided the final conflict between Himself and the chief priests and Pharisees.

Jesus indicated often that He had a fixed plan for His work and a particular time and place to die. (See Luke 13:31-33; John 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20; 10:17, 18.) Earlier in His ministry there were times when He stayed away from those who would kill Him (John 7:1), when He "hid himself" and "went forth out of their hand" from the danger of being stoned (John 8:59; 10:39). But now He has come to Jerusalem to die, and He removes all doubts concerning His claim to be the promised King. He lays claim to the allegiance of those who believe, in a manner to approve and strengthen their faith just before it is to be so severely tested by His death.

It was God's will that He should be so acclaimed in this city that their rejection might be without cause. It was an answer to the doubts of the vacillating and unconvinced. It was a challenge to the power and authority of the corrupt rulers who were so hostile toward Jesus.

The Pharisees ordered Jesus to rebuke His disciples and stop the tumult, but He said, "I tell you that, if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

It was indeed a stirring scene. As the people see Jesus ride from Bethany, permitting those around Him to acclaim Him King, more and more of them join the throng. Mixing their admiration for His tremendous miracles with their fabulous hopes of Messianic splendor, they praise Him for the past and rejoice for the future.

As He came over the top of the Mount of Olives and saw the city spread in full view below Him with the magnificent temple nearest Him, Jesus wept. The word used to describe His weeping at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35) means to "shed tears"; but the word used in Luke 19:41 means to "sob and cry audibly like a child." He was shaken with grief in the midst of the joyous throng because He knew how shallow their faith, and how false their hopes, and how unreal their professed allegiance. Clearly He foresaw the latter part of the week and the tumultuous clamor: "Crucify, crucify him! Give us Barabbas!" Beyond that He saw what made Him weep in pity—the terrible misery in that city forty years hence, when the armies of Rome would bring upon it God's judgment for rejecting Him (Luke 19:41-44). See also Luke 21:5-24; 23:27-31; Matthew 23:33-36; Deuteronomy 28:44-57. All these things did come upon that generation as one may read in particular in Josephus' *Wars of the Jews*. Jesus said all this would happen "because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." What a visitation of blessings has been given to us! How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

Enter: The King

As He came on to the city "all the city was stirred, saying, Who is this?" (Matt. 21:10). Often men had asked that question concerning Him. He even pressed the question upon them Himself: "Who say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). "The Christ, whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42). It was to show who He was that He came into the city in such manner that day. In the face of Jerusalem skeptics and officials, the testimony of the multitudes was mild and weak, saying, "This is the prophet, Jesus" (Matt. 21:11). Yes, He wore His royalty, even on this occasion, with the simplicity of a prophet. But here was a prophet with the authority of a King, not a mere teacher of doctrines who could be ignored. From now on Jerusalem must do one of two things—crush Him, or bow to Him.

Mark's account makes it plain that Jesus did not cleanse the temple

until the next day. Now He "entered into Jerusalem, into the temple; and when he had looked round about upon all things, it being now eventide, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve" (Mark 11:11). It sounds as if He were taking charge of the place as His own and looking it over to plan improvements, and no one dared to challenge Him. We wonder how early in the day it had all started, but now it is evening, and with majestic calm He retires to Bethany. The next morning, having withered a fig tree on the way, He came in and asserted divine authority over the house of God, cleansing it as He had at the very beginning of His public ministry.

Then and there He worked more miracles, healing the lame and blind. Thus began the week of plots, controversies and traps that were directed against Jesus by the envious rulers who dared not take Him openly, but grew ever more fanatically determined to put Him to death. How shameful and how revolting that their object was accomplished by the help of a traitor among His own disciples!

Still no one could take His life from Him. He laid it down of Himself. He went to Jerusalem to die for you and for me. This power and authority He showed not to avoid death, but to show us He died that we might believe and live.

For Further Study:

Edersheim, Alfred. *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. II.

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956 (reprint of 1886 ed.).

Pp. 363-373. Helpful discussion of the Triumphal Entry.

Foster, R. C. *Studies in the Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962. Pp. 1086-1102. Good harmonized study of Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-44; John 12:12-19.

JESUS FACES THE CROSS (John 12)

The raising of Lazarus in the presence of a multitude, and next door to Jerusalem, had great effect. It caused many to believe on Jesus and strengthened the faith of many others. The report of it spread, causing excitement in Jerusalem and among the crowds that came to the Passover a few weeks later. The enemies of Jesus became more and more determined to kill Him (John 11).

Therefore Jesus went away to an obscure place called Ephraim (John 11:54). Then He went along the border of Samaria and Galilee, crossed over into Perea, and journeyed toward Jerusalem for the last Passover and the crucifixion. On that journey, He taught His disciples about the coming of His kingdom, prayer, and again predicted His death. Six days before the Passover He arrived at Bethany again, and at a supper in the home of Mary and Martha, Mary anointed His head and feet with precious ointment.

Multitudes who had come early for the Passover heard that Jesus was at Bethany and came to see Him. On the following day He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and on the next day He cleansed the temple. On the third day, probably, Tuesday, there were many questions and controversies between Jesus and the rulers of the Jews. He told parables concerning God's judgment upon them and gave them a long rebuke and denunciation. It was most likely on that same day that a group of Gentiles who had come to worship at the feast sought an interview with Jesus.

"We Would See Jesus"

A group of Gentiles who had accepted Jewish worship had come to the Passover. They were not merely Greek-speaking Jews. They were not necessarily from Greece, for all non-Jews were called Greeks. They were proselytes, converts to the Jewish religion (cp. Acts 2:10; 6:5). The Old Testament made provision for them to bring sacrifices (Lev. 22:18) and to pray to God in the temple (I Kings 8:41-43; Isa. 56:6, 7). In Jesus' time a very sharp distinction was made between Jew and Gentiles, and even proselytes were looked down upon as inferior to a born Jew. They were strictly forbidden to enter any part of the temple except the court of the Gentiles.

The Greeks came to Philip. Philip's name was of Greek origin, and his home city of Bethsaida was a city where Greeks as well as

Israelites lived. Perhaps these Greeks had a former acquaintance with Philip.

They requested, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21). This was a polite and formal request. Merely to look at Jesus would have been no problem. Evidently they wanted to talk with Jesus. Philip conferred with Andrew who was also from Bethsaida (John 1:44) and his name was also of a Greek origin. Philip did not take the Gentiles to Jesus immediately because Jesus' teaching ministry had been limited to the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5, 6; 15:24) and because a meeting between Jesus and Gentiles would excite the wrath of the Jews against Him, especially if held in the temple (cp. Acts 21:28, 29).

There is no indication that Andrew and Philip brought the Greeks to Jesus, but they brought the problem to Jesus. Jesus answered Philip and Andrew. Were the Greeks there? Did they ever get an interview with Jesus? The whole answer of Jesus must have surprised the disciples, and it may seem to us strange and off the subject, until we study it well. Jesus was moved with far-reaching thoughts and deep emotions. There was no time now for Him to become a teacher to the Gentiles, but His heart was much concerned about them (John 10:16). He was on His way to the cross (in two or three days) to be a Savior for both Gentiles and Jews. Death on the cross was the only way that He could help them.

"The Hour Is Come"

Jesus answered, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." (John 12:23). The time was right here for Jesus to die, and rise and send forth the message of salvation to all men. Death was the way He was to be glorified (John 12:16; 13:31, 32; 17:1; Phil. 2:5-11). By His death He would draw all men unto Him (John 12:32).

When Jesus came to Jerusalem for the fourth Passover season of His public ministry He knew that the time had come for Him to lay down His life for the people as a sacrifice and sin-offering. He had foreknown from the beginning that He would be killed and the third day rise again (see John 2:19-22). He had known and referred to the many prophecies that foretold His sufferings and death (Luke 18:31-34; Mark 9:12; cf. Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Zech. 11:12, 13; 12:10; 13:7, and many others). He had indicated foreknowledge of the very time and place at which He would die (Luke 13:31-35; 12:50; Matt. 16:21). Indeed, He had known and serenely faced the fact that for two years

numerous attempts had been made to kill Him, especially in Jerusalem (John 5:18; Luke 4:29; Mark 3:6; John 7:1, 19, 25, 32, 44; 8:37, 40, 59; 10:31, 39; 11:16).

Jesus gave a simple illustration of the universal principle which He had on His heart—as a grain of wheat must die to produce, so every life that is kept from sacrifice is useless and lost. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be: if any man serve me, him will the Father honor” (John 12:24-26).

Jesus applied His principle. “Life” is used here to mean “self,” and loving it is holding it dear as an end in itself. Anyone who gives his life or allows it to be used up for others as if he hated it is really putting it in safekeeping with Jesus.

Jesus stated it as a fixed principle, for us as well as for himself, that one who saves his life for himself is losing it, while life is kept safe by one who gives it up. The one who lives for self is hardly alive. “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth” (I Tim. 5:6). Often a young person is told by worldly people that he is throwing his life away in service for others who do not deserve it or in working for an unattainable or unpopular ideal. Jesus, however, says that these are the ones whose lives are kept by the power of God. Jesus leads all who would serve Him into the way of self-sacrifice.

Our Lord’s spirit was deeply disturbed. A combination of powerful feelings shook the heart of Jesus. The opposition of the Jews was reaching its climax and He was conscious of the terrible punishment yet to come upon the nation (See Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; Matt. 23:37-39; 24:2, 16-21). The grossness of sin that would accomplish the crucifixion filled Him with horror. The opportunity to send forth light and salvation to all the world, so long planned and worked for, was exciting in its near approach. The realization of the cross and bearing the sin of the world was just coming in full strength upon the human consciousness of Jesus. No wonder His soul was troubled!

The Son of God was one with the Father, eternal, Creator of all things (Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:16; John 1:3). Yet when He was made flesh, He was truly human—He felt hunger and weariness, knew temptation and godly fear, needed faith and prayer. His sufferings were real, and He faced the cross with dread. Jesus had known from the beginning

that He must die and on the third day be raised up. Again and again Jesus faced the cross, understood its necessity, and overcame every temptation to avoid it; but here in John 12 we see Him deeply troubled by the nearness and the bitter reality of it. This manifests the real humanity of Jesus.

Jesus said, "Father, save me from this hour, but for this cause came I to this hour" (John 12:27). It may be that He was praying, as in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42), and answering himself immediately with "but for this cause came I unto this hour." Or He may have made it a question: "Shall I ask God to deliver me from this hour? For this cause I came," as in John 18:11. Certainly this did not express unwillingness to go to the cross, but acceptance of it as the very purpose of His life.

Jesus came into the world to be our Savior, to give His life a ransom for men. He was born to die. He was delivered up to death "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), being foreknown indeed from the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1:20). Jesus' sacrificial death was the only basis on which God could forgive any sin from Adam until now.

Jesus had to die to fulfill the law and retire the old covenant God had made with Israel so that He might make a new and better covenant with men of all nations. In His death He nailed the law to the cross and took it out of the way (Col. 2:14, 15). His death bought redemption for the Gentiles, broke down the middle wall of partition, and made both Jew and Gentile one new man in Him (Eph. 2:11-18). Therefore when the Greeks sought Jesus, He meditated upon the great necessity of the cross. Being lifted up to die was the great condition upon which He could bring all kinds of men to himself for salvation, unity, and fellowship with God. It is still the message of the cross that draws men to Him, that reconciles them to God, and that unites them in Christian fellowship.

"Father, glorify thy name" (John 12:28) is His fervent and unqualified prayer. He knew the price to be paid, the manner in which God must be glorified through His own death on the cross. God immediately answered His prayer, so all could hear. "I have glorified it" seems most likely to be a compliment to Jesus' feelings, the Father answered the heroic prayer with the only assurance that would satisfy Jesus: "I have glorified it, Son; and I will again." Jesus' sufferings would not be in vain. Some heard the words well enough to say that an angel spoke to Jesus. Perhaps those who said it thundered were unwilling to admit a supernatural answer to Jesus' words. The words

were addressed to Jesus; however, they came not only for His sake, but also for theirs.

Jesus felt Himself in the midst of the great struggle with Satan and fully confident of the outcome of it. By the influence of Satan the whole world and everyone in it had gone into sin; and by sin, into death and condemnation. By Jesus' death the universal power of Satan was broken—a method for forgiveness of sin, regeneration of men, and the inheritance of life was to be an established reality upon the earth.

"If I Be Lifted Up"

Jesus claimed that the salvation of all men rested on His shoulders. We need to remember who it is that is speaking here. Jesus is usually praised for His lowly and unselfish manner of life, and rightly so; but when one lists together the stupendous claims which He made concerning Himself, His lowliness of life looks strange by contrast. He must surely be the infinite God condescending to self-sacrificing and self-effacing service for men; or else His claims are false, swelling words of vanity, and He is the most consummate egotist, the most unconscionable liar the world has heard of.

He repeatedly used expressions about Himself that could be said only of Deity: "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). "The Son of man shall send forth angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom" (Matt. 13:41). "All things are delivered unto me of my Father . . . neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son" (Matt. 11:27). "He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13). "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25). "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "I am the bread of life . . . he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). "I came down from heaven" (John 6:38). "I am the good shepherd . . . I am come that they might have life" (John 10:10, 11). "I am the true vine . . . without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:1, 5). "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27). In John 5:17-29, Jesus called God His Father, "Making himself equal with God"; called Himself "the Son of God"; said that He would raise all the dead and execute judgment

upon all. Three times Jesus directly said, "I am the Son of God" (Mark 14:61, 62; John 9:35-37; 10:36). It was commonly recognized by the people, by the rulers, by the devil, and by the soldiers who crucified Him that He claimed to be the Son of God.

He represented God's will as being more concerned with men's acceptance of Him as Lord and Savior than with anything else, and as being fulfilled in those who believed and followed Him. He continually made Himself the center of importance for all men, more necessary than life itself, and the sum and source of all blessings and success. Who besides Jesus could make this statement: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32). He had the divine power, authority, and trustworthiness; He had the unbounded love and the willingness to pay the price to win the hearts of men. Notice the great condition upon which He would be able to draw and to bless all men—"if I be lifted up."

What did it mean to "be lifted up"? The same expression is used in John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34. It refers to the crucifixion every time—His being lifted up on the cross to die. John explains definitely that He said this "signifying by what manner of death he should die" (John 12:33). The multitude understood Him to mean death. They thought the Christ could not die, and therefore asked who was to be lifted up. They knew of Psalm 110:4; Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 7:14, and similar passages. They could not see how He could die and still fulfill these. They correctly associated "The Son of man" (John 12:23) with the Christ.

Jesus answered them, "Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light" (John 12:35, 36). This is an appeal for them to follow what is revealed of God's will and plan without waiting for answers to all their questions. They had reason to believe Him; they did not need to judge Him in every detail. So it is with us; we should walk in the light we have, not asking to know everything before we obey.

Indeed, it is the loving sacrifice and the amazing mercy of the Christ that draws our alien, sinful hearts unto Him, and causes us to be reconciled to God. Without the cross and its power to redeem, Christ could command and threaten us from without, but He could not draw and transform us from within. The cross is the great condition of His Saviorhood. As both Lord and Savior, as Priest and Teacher of men, He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb.

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2:10; 5:9). To preach the gospel of Christ is to proclaim the doctrine of the cross, which, though it seems foolish or unacceptable to some men, has a peculiar power to save and to transform others (I Cor. 1:18-25; 2:1, 2). It was for the crucifixion that Jesus came into the world; He was born in order to die on the cross for us (Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 1:15; 2:6).

For Further Study:

See comments on John 12:20-36 in the following commentaries:

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1942. Pp. 858-882.

Morris, Leon. *New International Commentary: The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids; Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971. Pp. 589-606.

Westcott, B. F. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951 (reprint of 1881 ed.). Pp. 180-184.

AN EXAMPLE IN HUMILITY AND LOVE (John 13)

Two days before the Passover Jesus again told His disciples that He was to be delivered up to be crucified (Matt. 26:2). That same day the chief priests and elders met and plotted how they could arrest Jesus by stealth and kill Him. They decided they could not do it during the feast because of the people. Then Judas came to them and offered to betray Jesus so they could take Him in secret; and they gladly paid him thirty pieces of silver to do it.

The Last Supper

On the first day of unleavened bread, the day on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover meal for Him and His disciples. They made ready for it in the usual way and at the usual time in an upper room to which Jesus directed them (Matt. 26:17-21; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13). Jesus met with them for that ancient and sacred memorial, knowing that it would be His last supper with His friends on earth before His death.

This had to be on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan; it could fall on any day of the week. The next day, the day on which Jesus was crucified, was called the Preparation, the day before the Sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54-56; John 19:31). Hence the day of the last supper was Thursday (as we count it), but the beginning of Friday as the Jews count days from sunset to sunset.

The Sabbath mentioned must have been the regular Saturday Sabbath, for the special day of holy convocation in Passover Week (if it ever was called a Sabbath) was the *first* day of unleavened bread (Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:6, 7) and would have been the day on which Jesus was crucified or even the day before, according to Mark 12:12, since Jesus was alive and free on the day on which the Passover lamb was killed and the leaven was put out of the houses of Israel. The next day he was killed. The next day was "the Sabbath." "And when the Sabbath was past" before the first day of the week. The accounts do not say that two Sabbaths passed before the first day of the week. Read Luke 23:54—24:1 and Mark 15:42—16:12.

Conflicting Emotions

The account in John 13 undoubtedly describes the Passover supper

if we believe Matthew, Mark and Luke. Some critics have said that John here contradicts the declaration of the first three Gospels that Jesus ate the regular Passover supper. The critics allege that John here says this meal was a meal before the Passover meal. The phrase, "Before the feast" (John 13:1), does not give the time of the supper; it modifies the verb "knew." The meaning is this: "Jesus, knowing before the Passover that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, and having loved His own that were in the world, loved them to the end [or to the fullest extent]." As He approached the sorrows and burdens of this eventful and fateful night, He knew well that the hour of His sufferings and departure had come, but His heart was filled with love for His disciples. These companions and co-workers He was leaving behind in the world, exposed to the dangers and hardships. He knew that Satan had put it into Judas' heart to betray Him. This does not mean that Judas was helpless and overpowered by the devil without any fault of his own, but that Judas had allowed the devil to deceive and lead him into this sin. He knew that Satan had asked also for Simon "that he might sift him as wheat" (Luke 22:31-34). He knew that all would be bewildered and shaken by the fact that He would actually be delivered into the hands of His enemies; that they would be scattered as sheep when the shepherd is stricken (Matt. 26:31).

Jesus also knew that, instead of studying His sayings and the words of the prophets how that the Son and Servant of God must surrender Himself to death and give Himself a ransom for sin, they were thinking in the opposite direction how they were going to be exalted to chief places in the kingdom of divine glory which they imagined must soon appear out of the crisis that was evidently impending. It must have grieved Him and made Him feel lonely in this selfish world to know that they were quarreling with one another about their relative ranks and places of honor (Luke 22:24), in the very night when He was descending to the very depths of self-abnegation, claiming nothing of His own in order to bear the cross of shame to a criminal's death for the sake of those who wrongly thought they had rights and rank. Possibly this dispute began over the prestige connected with certain positions at the table. It has been suggested that Judas, who had already bargained to betray Him, took a place of honor beside Jesus and that Peter went all the way to the lowest place. The diners lay upon couches, each leaning upon his left elbow, three men to a couch, with Jesus at the place of chief honor, in the center of the head couch. John lay at (not upon) Jesus' breast: that is, just

in front of Him or at His right side. To ask a question privately John leaned back upon Jesus' breast (John 13:25).

In full awareness of His divine majesty, He humbled Himself to wash the disciples' feet as a loving service, and without degrading or belittling Himself at all (John 13:3). He served in this humble fashion, not because He forgot His divine nature, but because He remembered it. Jesus could have abased and humbled the disciples into abject and cringing fear; but He loved them. He sought to teach them, not to coerce them. He wanted to draw them to Him, not to drive them from Him. He was not willing to debase and crush them into cravens. He was willing, rather, with infinite patience and love to give them example and teaching to build them up and elevate them to that true greatness which was like His own, i.e., which seeks opportunities to give of self in service to others because of love for them. He had taught them all this before (Mark 10:41-45); this wasn't their first offense in selfish pride. Still He didn't scold and criticize them, but taught the same things over again with added promises of their exaltation with Him in the future (Luke 22:23-30). The Lord knew that we do not always learn these things the first time we hear them, and agree to them, but need many lessons.

The Master, A Servant

Jesus arose from the supper and put off His outer robe and belt, and perhaps a tunic, to work dressed like a slave, He washed the disciples' feet (John 13:4). The disciples were perhaps taken aback by Jesus' abrupt action, but their consciences must have troubled them when they realized what He was about to do. Everything Jesus needed was there. The disciples should have washed one another's feet, but none was willing to take the place of a servant and treat others as so much superior. Jesus washed even Judas' feet. Pictures often show the disciples seated about a table, thus creating the wrong impression about this act. As the disciples lay on couches about the table, the water was poured over their feet into a basin; the feet then were washed and wiped. But why did Jesus do this? Not only for a lesson. It was a genuine act of loving service, an act of humble willingness to do the most lowly service for His friends, an act of practical courtesy which they had forgotten or avoided in their preoccupation with selfish pride.

In the land of Palestine the rough and dusty roads, the absence of stockings, the use of sandals, the habit of walking barefoot, the much greater amounts of walking than we do, all make it necessary

to give the feet frequent washings. (Read Gen. 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judg. 19:21; I Sam. 25:41; II Sam. 11:8). These passages show that washing the feet was the first act on entering a tent or a house after a journey. This is regularly done when entering a house, especially the better upper rooms which were usually carpeted. The shoes were never worn in the house. It was the common dictate of good manners to provide either water for the guests to wash their own feet, or a slave to do it. It became almost synonymous with hospitality (I Tim. 5:10). Jesus rebuked a Pharisee, in whose house He was entertained, for not providing water for His feet (Luke 7:44). From an early date, however, it was considered one of the lowest tasks of servants (I Sam. 25:41), probably because it was done by the youngest and least-trained servants, or because of the idea of defilement connected with the foot. Therefore, if rendered voluntarily, it was a symbol of complete devotion. The undoing of the latchet or thongs of the sandals (Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27) seems to refer to the same menial duty.

When Jesus came to Peter, that reverent but bold and impulsive disciple spoke out in amazement and objection to what seemed to him unfitting: "Lord, dost *thou* wash my feet?" This outburst of feeling set off a little discussion which brought out the symbolic meaning of Jesus' act. Jesus said, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." They certainly saw that He poured water on their feet and dried them with a towel, but that He did more than that they would understand later. Because he didn't understand, Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." Peter had good intentions, no doubt, in saying that he would never permit the Lord to be so abased for him; but it was as if to say, "I am too good and too fair to let my Lord be humiliated for me." It was a dangerous frame of mind. Jesus answered him with deep significance, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."

Every one of us must consent for Christ to do a much more humiliating and more difficult thing for us. He had to take our sin and our shame upon Himself, bear our punishment, serve our sentence of just condemnation. If I say, "Oh, no, I could never let Him take my punishment upon Himself," I have no part with Him. Yet we are often inclined to that attitude of veiled pride that seems to say, "I'd never permit Jesus to be humbled for me." But He was. We must admit that He bore our death that we might live. We must let unbounded condescension of His divine grace put to shame all our pride and humble us completely, while we confess that He, our Master

and Lord, did for us what we were unworthy and unable and unwilling to do for Him or one another.

"Ye Should Do As I Have Done"

Jesus wanted the disciples to consider the spiritual meaning of what He had done. He made it clear that even though He was Lord and Master, their supreme superior, yet He was willing to serve. He reasoned with them, "If I have acted as a lowly servant for you, you ought to do such acts for one another." Our Lord's statement, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example; that ye also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14, 15), was not a positive command to observe a set form as a church ordinance. No evidence suggests that the early church so understood it. It is a moral lesson by example. As Jesus did a useful service in love and humility, so we also should do any useful service for one another in love and humility.

Truly, indeed, if He the Lord and Master, was willing to do such a service for men, we should be willing, also. He was teaching us to do in like manner. He gave us the example that we should do as He did (John 13:15). Whenever washing one another's feet is an act of practical courtesy and helpfulness, that we can perform in a true spirit of simple love and humble service, we ought to wash one another's feet. But when it is of no practical helpfulness, when it is performed as a public religious ritual to *display* our "humility," at special seasons, toward select persons, it does not seem to fit the pattern Jesus gave. "Ritualizing such an act of life absolutely destroys its meaning."

The Great Commission assigned to the apostles the task of teaching the believers to observe all things that Jesus commanded; but we have no teaching from them concerning foot washing as a ceremony in the church. They do teach, however, lowliness, subjection, and loving service (Rom. 12:3, 10, 16; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2; 5:21; Phil. 2:3-8; Col. 3:12; I Pet. 5:5, etc.). There is no indication in the way that Jesus did the act at the last supper that He was instituting a form of worship or making it part of His death. It is not an act of worship to God, but of service to man out of the right kind of a godly heart of humility and love. Even those who urge it as a perpetual ordinance in the church teach that it "symbolizes humility and service." Exactly so: Jesus gave a very striking example and symbol of that manner of conduct and attitudes of heart that He wants us to have. *He does not want us to repeat the symbol, but to practice*

reality. His example was clear, and no command of His is more direct or authoritative.

If the Master does not consider Himself too good to wash His servants feet, then the servants are not too good to wash feet. Christ was teaching them not to think that they were above any loving service to another. The person who practices this principle in life will experience the highest good and the deepest happiness (John 13:16, 17).

"A New Commandment"

Jesus warned the disciples that one of them would betray Him. Being asked who it was, Jesus said it was the one to whom He would give a bite of bread after He had dipped it in the dish. Then He dipped one and gave it to Judas, and Judas went out of the room. Jesus told the disciples again that He would be leaving them in a little while (John 13:18-33).

Our Lord then told the disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35). A similar commitment had been given in Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Jesus did not use the Greek word for "new" that especially means of recent origin, but one that means in new condition, possibly never used before, unmarred by age, or not outworn. The commandment, as He gave it with and according to His own example—*as I have loved you*—has a new quality and power, a new motive and scope. It was new in the sense that Jesus by His example had given a richer dimension to love. As a result love is not so much a duty imposed by commandment; it is more an inward power, active in self-giving for the benefit of others without limit. True love, rightly understood, includes so much (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10) that it can really be a badge that will always identify Jesus' pupils and followers as His very own. Of course, this is not the only test of discipleship, but it is a critical one.

Love is supreme. To love God is the greatest commandment; the second like unto it is to love one's neighbor as himself. Jesus said that love is the mark of His disciples (Matt. 22:34-40; John 13:35). "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10), and "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14). Peter said it is to be practiced "Above all things" (I Peter 4:8). John testified that "he that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (I John 4:8). Love is not only the crowning attainment of mature Christians, but it is also an indispensable

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essential of any character that is Christian. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema" (I Cor. 16:22). Love is a test of our faith and without it we are as unorthodox and un-Christian as we would be without faith in God. In view of the large amount of teaching in the Bible about love and the stress laid upon the importance of it, do you think the churches of today really do enough to teach and to require the practice of love among their members?

We must understand the true nature of love. Much of the inadequacy of teaching on love in the church may be related to the fact that love is often misrepresented and misunderstood. Many think it is opposed to justice, to correction, and to chastening. We are all likely to think of love too much as sentiment apart from the actions of love. Love is not theory, but practice. It is a matter of emotions and motives of the heart, but these are made real as they become the cause and the spirit of many actions. Love is giving of ourselves in the interests of others. It is active and eager concern for the welfare of those loved. It is directly opposed to indifference and neglect. If we do what is right in our own sight, indifferent to its effect upon a brother, we do not walk in love (I Cor. 8:1-13; Rom. 14:15). If we hope to be saved through the gospel, but will not do or give anything to save others, we have not love in our hearts.

Jesus brought to men a new understanding of love, a new appreciation for it, and an intensified motive for loving. He also gave us new power to love, through the gift of the Holy Spirit: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). Love was not unknown in the old covenant, but it is revealed more fully in the new covenant, not because God became any more loving, but because the way was opened up by Christ for men to have a better and fuller fellowship with God.

For Further Study:

Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*. New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d. Pp. 341-355. Helpful on the spiritual lessons in John 13:1-20.

Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Vol. II. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956 reprint of 1886 edition. Pp.

479-509. Excellent background information of the Last Supper.

Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Gospel According*

AN EXAMPLE IN HUMILITY AND LOVE

to *John*, Vol. II. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954. Pp. 219-241. Thorough treatment of the date of the meal and of the events and teaching in John 13.

Morris, Leon. *New International Commentary: The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971. Pp. 612-635. Thorough treatment of the passage.

LAST INSTRUCTIONS AND PREDICTIONS BEFORE THE CROSS (John 14-16)

In this study we look at the sober scene of the Passover feast where Jesus was eating His last supper with the disciples. After He had washed His disciples' feet and had eaten the meal, probably accompanied by the usual psalms and ceremonies of the occasion, He sorrowfully warned them that He was to be betrayed and delivered into the hands of His enemies, and that He was going where they could not come. Jesus' prediction that one of them would betray Him caused them to ask each in turn, "Is it I?" Jesus indicated to Judas that He knew of Judas' infamous plot, and in a veiled manner which others did not understand He sent Judas out (John 13:21-30). Peter and the others (Matt. 26:35) asked why they could not go with Jesus, and professed willingness to dare and endure anything for Him; but they were warned that they would all stumble in faith and would flee, and, especially, Peter would deny the Lord (John 13:36-38).

Sometime in the midst of these events at the close of the ancient traditional supper, Jesus instituted the new supper of the broken bread and fruit of the vine in memory of His own body and blood given as a sacrifice for the sins of many. We can not tell whether or not Judas left before the Lord's Supper was instituted. Apparently it is not necessary for us to know.

Ties That Bind

To Jesus this night was a time of tender feelings and a troubled heart. We can not know how much this was true! But we can see some glimpses. He had come into the world with love in His great divine heart to woo and to win the world, to serve and not to be served, to save and not to judge. For three years He had seen and borne with the folly and faithlessness, the hardness of heart and confirmed selfishness of men; He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Through all His labor and affliction of spirit these twelve men had been His companions (Luke 22:28-30; Matt. 19:28). They were "his own that were in the world"; He had loved them, and He "loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). They had become dear to Him personally, and they were precious to Him. He was to entrust to them the word of life for the world. To a

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great extent the results of His sacrificial death depended upon their faithfulness and spiritual stamina. He knew how great were the trials they would have to meet. He knew how weak and human they were.

On this night they seemed to be showing how weak and dull and undependable they were. He knew their selfish ambition—contending over who was greatest (Luke 22:24). He could not make them understand His departure or many things that He wanted to speak to them (John 16:1-12, 17-19). He knew they would not be able to watch and pray with Him in the hour of crisis and would forsake Him. Nevertheless, this was not a time of censure, but a time to speak with sympathy and patience gentle and hopeful words of encouragement and reassurance, lest their weakness and dullness cause them to be overcome by despair.

He looked upon them as "little children" (John 13:33). His words in these chapters (John 14-16) and the intercessory prayer that follows (chapter 17) are like the parting words of a wise and fond mother to her children gathered around her when she knows that death will soon take her from them. He spoke with great love and intimate and personal care for them, giving warnings and promises to help them meet the great trials that would come upon them. With these thoughts in mind read again, all at once, from John 13:31 to 17:26. No man can have greater love for his friends than that which Jesus proved Himself to have for His (John 15:12-15). No mother could have more deep and tender affections and longings for her children than Jesus had for His own. His heart was filled with sorrow on their account.

The Proof of Love

In these paragraphs Jesus says many things that point out the proof of His love for the disciples.

1. His open and plain speech. "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). "I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (15:15). He wanted them enlightened and prepared for the things to come. He did not withhold from them His own feelings or the Father's purposes. He put confidence in them and took them into His plans and interests as fully as He could.

2. The promise to prepare a place for them. Love seeks the continued welfare and provision for those who are dear (14:2).

3. The desire to have them where He is to be. Love seeks not to be separated from, but present with, its own (14:3; 17:2).

4. The promise to hear their prayers and do what they ask of Him

and of God in His name. Love seeks to grant every reasonable request (14:13, 14; 16:23, 24).

5. The promise to give them the divine aid and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, another Companion in His place. This promise involved far more than they could then understand (14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13).

6. The desire to give them His peace, to comfort them in fullness of confidence in the Father and in Him, that they be neither troubled nor fearful (14:1, 27; 16:33).

7. The purpose to make full His joy in them—joy that no one could take away (15:11; 16:22, 24). It is the very nature of love to give, and to seek always to give true and lasting joy to those who are loved.

8. The way He prayed for them (17:6-19).

9. Most of all, the fact that He laid down His life for them—"Greater love hath no man than this" (15:13).

Jesus also stated that they should prove their love for Him—by keeping His commandments (John 14:21-23, 24; 15:10-14), especially that they should love one another (13:34, 35; 15:12, 17). He also told them that if they truly loved Him with understanding they would rejoice that He went as He did in obedience to the Father, who is greater than He (14:28).

Any one that does not keep Christ's words and obey Him does not love Him (14:23); but His words are the Father's, who sent Him (14:24). He that hates Christ hates the Father also (15:23). Hence no man can truly love and honor God unless He will receive and obey the words of Christ. We look at ourselves and the question arises: "How many of them?" Oh, alas, how we all fall short! Does I Corinthians 16:22 prove that we are all anathema? Let us all have humility when we start to profess how we love the Lord. Let us not judge our brethren too strictly. Let us ask for mercy and have faith in His mercy that we may do His will for love of Him and not in self-righteousness.

The Deity and Necessity of Jesus

The gentle and consoling words of Jesus in John 14 have become favorites of many people and have been applied to many situations; but we must consider the situation in which they were first spoken. The apostles were made sorrowful and troubled by Jesus' sayings about betrayal and death. If they had understood God's plan, they might have borne their sorrow more easily. Jesus' departure would

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have saddened them because of personal affections, but the outcome would have been worth it all.

In the midst of His sorrow and expressions of unselfish love Jesus is making Himself equal with God and indispensable to man. "Believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1) puts faith in Him and in God on the same plane. The real source of consolation was to be found in faith. There was really no cause to despair, because God and Christ would be depended upon. The Greek word for "believe" is the same in form both times, but it is a form that can be either indicative (a statement) or imperative (a command). In either case they were not accused of being altogether without faith, but were told to keep on believing.

"In my Father's house . . . I prepare a place" (John 14:2, 3), assumes proprietorship there. "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him" (John 14:7) is a staggering claim, which provoked the request, "Show us the Father." Then Jesus made the unqualified statement of deity that can not be misunderstood or explained away. His answer to Philip would certainly be intolerable arrogance and blasphemy if it were any less than absolutely true. Here is Jesus; and by the same token here is our God! Any god we worship that is different from the character and teaching of Jesus is merely an idol, perhaps devised in our minds instead of fashioned with our hands, but a concoction of men. Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God to man. God is in Him. If you can't see it, believe it for the sake of the works of God which He did (John 10:37, 38; 14:10, 11).

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). To know God we must learn of Christ. To come to God we must come by Him: He is the Vine (John 15:1-9), the stem of all enduring and fruitful life. To bear fruit we must abide in Him. Apart from him we can do nothing! We stumble over the simplicity of these statements and others like them in the scripture. When will we surrender our theories and our logic that we may have Christ, the Truth, and the divine Wisdom? (I Cor. 1:30; 4:18-20). When will we cast off our self-righteousness to be found only in Christ and His righteousness?

The Promise of the Spirit

Jesus promised He would not leave the apostles desolate (John 14:18). Literally the word means "orphans." He had called them "children" (John 13:33); now He promised not to leave them fatherless. He would send "another comforter" (John 14:16). The idea of

the Greek word is not easy to put into English. "Helper," "Advocate," "Counselor," and "Companion" are fairly close to it. The word "Comforter" was first used in translating this passage by Wycliffe six hundred years ago, when it meant "strengthened." But it has changed so much in use since then that it is misleading to modern readers. There is no New Testament teaching that the Holy Spirit is to make anyone comfortable, but rather that He is to make us strong, active, capable, and faithful in the Lord's service. Yet there is joy and peace in the soul as a result of living by His guidance. "Another" implies that the Holy Spirit was to be the one to take Christ's place as a permanent companion for the apostles.

He is a divine person, like Christ and God. He is called the Spirit of truth because His special mission to the apostles was to reveal the truth because this name describes His character. The world in its unbelief, its preference for darkness, its unwillingness to acknowledge God's perfect truthfulness and authority cannot recognize and accept the Spirit. Some men could not receive Jesus because they resisted the truth He told them; in like manner those who reject the Spirit's message (because it reveals their sinfulness and they prefer other ideas) cannot receive Him. They keep themselves from knowing Him. The disciples had Christ and His words then, which gave them the presence of the Spirit. "He abideth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17). The Spirit was to enter into their lives more completely and control them from within.

In the sad hours of farewell before His arrest, Jesus gave help and encouragement to His apostles. He warned them of trials they would have to meet. He promised them they would have the help of the Holy Spirit to guide them and assist them in their work of witnessing for Him (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). These promises apply to the apostles alone as the context in each case shows. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles so they would remember Christ's words and reveal His truth to the world (John 14:17, 26). The Spirit teaches us these things through the words of the apostles as found in the New Testament. The Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth and enable them to predict the future (John 16:13). These promised powers were to qualify them as spokesmen for Christ executing His testament on the earth, and making known the faith once for all revealed unto the saints.

The workings of the Spirit that are listed in these passages were to prepare the apostles for their special work. They had a very important work to do in first delivering the word of Christ to the world.

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Promises of power and authority through the Holy Spirit were given again in meetings Jesus had with them after the resurrection (Luke 24:49; John 20:22, 23; Acts 1:5, 8). These promises pointed to a definite event that happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Aren't you glad to know that the apostles were given their message directly from God by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit? We know they did not speak their own ideas and could not be mistaken. Their teaching is "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). The truth and guidance that God gave to them are given to us through their words, which stand unchanged to the end of time. We do not need any inspired men today to reveal God's will to us.

What we need is God's Spirit dwelling in us through obedience to His Word. We should not apply to ourselves the promises that were made only to the apostles. All Christians are certainly not expected to have the infallible inspiration and full authority to speak for Christ which was promised to the apostles. However, we ought to claim for our own those promises that were made to all who love and obey Christ. Such a promise is found in John 14:23: "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Jesus had promised before that every believer would have the Spirit (John 7:38, 39). The apostles taught that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Christ (Acts 2:38, 39; 5:32). The Spirit is not just an extra, but a real and vital part of our salvation (Titus 3:4-7; Rom. 8:8-17). The Christian life is lived in the Spirit and bears the fruit of the Spirit (Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22-25). To all practical purposes, this is equivalent to Christ living in us and our living by faith in Him (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:16, 17).

Let Christ's thoughts fill your mind; surrender your will to His will; let love for Him rule every part of your life; and God will make you a new creature, made alive with Christ through His Spirit dwelling in you.

For Further Study:

Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*, 3rd ed. New York: Harper and Row, n.d. Pp. 378-488. Forcefully shows Jesus' empathy with the apostles as He encourages them through His farewell instructions and promises recorded in John 14-16.

Butler, Paul. *The Gospel of John*, Vol. II. Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1965. Pp. 239-321. Helpful comment on John 14-16.

OUR LORD'S PRAYER FOR UNITY (John 17)

Jesus is our great high priest. He is the only one who is acceptable to God and worthy to make intercession for sinners. He made the one perfect sacrifice for sin, entered into the presence of God with His own blood, and sat down on the throne of mercy. Through Him Christians have access to the throne of God in prayer. On the eve of His sacrifice of Himself, at the last supper Jesus expressed His loving concern for His disciples as He tried to prepare them for the shock of His crucifixion.

Later the same night Jesus and His disciples went out of the upper room where they had eaten the Passover supper (John 14:31). He had much more to say to them, and so He continued His discussion as they made their way across the city toward Gethsemane. We do not know where they were during much of this discussion; but since the priests opened the gates of the temple to the people at midnight after the Passover supper, it is quite possible it was carried on in the temple courts.

Jesus offered His great intercessory prayer that the Father would glorify the Son (John 17:1-5), sanctify the disciples (John 17:6-19), and unify the believers (John 17:20-26). What unselfish purpose and loving concern, that in the face of agony and sorrow unto death, He prayed this fervent and farsighted prayer for us!

Before His prayer Jesus had said all that He could well say to the disciples, His thoughts naturally turned to God in prayer. He needed the companionship and support of God for the ordeal which He was facing, but He prayed chiefly for others. He was deeply concerned for sanctification of His intimate disciples and for the unity of all who believe on Him through the apostles' word. We simply cannot know how deep and strong were His heart's yearnings and how fervent His prayer on their behalf as He felt both His love for them and their great responsibility as He looked forward to seeing in them, and through them, the fruit of His own life and death.

First, Jesus prayed for Himself and His work (John 17:1-5), that having completed His work upon the earth He might be glorified, in God's way, even through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, in order that He might glorify the Father. He had received from God authority over all things (Matt. 11:27; 28:18) in order to accomplish the Father's will for the redemption of men. He had kept

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Himself within the Father's will and purpose and plan. He had dedicated Himself fully to the work. He had kept the Father's mind and spirit and work in Himself. Now, this very day, His life is to be expended utterly as the sacrifice for sin to bring righteousness to sinners.

The portion of the prayer concerning Himself is not selfish but is a plea to glorify God by the fulfillment of God's plans. It is also a yearning for the perfect fellowship with God that had been His glory in eternity.

Next our Lord turned His attention to the needs of the apostles (John 17:6-19). He asked that the apostles might (1) have His joy in themselves; (2) be kept safe from the evil forces of the world, both physically and spiritually; and (3) be pure in their devotion of their lives to God, made holy by the truth. He also prayed that they would be one.

Now He must entrust all His interests on earth to the apostles and leave them to be the embodiment and the carriers of the life-giving Spirit, and the way of salvation for all men. How He prayed for the apostles! Jesus was speaking to God in prayer apparently loud enough so that the disciples could hear Him and be strengthened by His words. He mentioned that the world hated the apostles because they were obeying the word of God. Rather than the easy option of taking the apostles out of this world, He prays for their spiritual strength for their task in the world (John 17:13-15).

Central in His concern for the apostles is that they must be dedicated—by God and by themselves. He prays: "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:17-19). Jesus asks God to set them apart for this task through the truth, the word which He had delivered to them. Through the agency of that potent word, as they kept it in heart and lived by it, God Himself was to be in them to direct, to speak, and to work in them His will. O that these apostles might be faithful and continue walking in the Lord and the Lord in them!

Sanctify means to make holy or to separate from ordinary things or uses and devote entirely to one worthy purpose. Jesus' statement "I sanctify myself" (John 17:19) shows the word does not mean primarily cleanse or purify. Jesus sanctified Himself by devoting Himself completely to the task of providing for our salvation. Jesus desired that every power and faculty of the apostles might be

separated from worldly uses and consecrated to God's purpose. When the truth of God fills the mind and rules the heart, the whole man is made holy. One cannot be truly sanctified by any enforced control of conduct from outside himself, but he is consecrated by the effect of his being convinced of the truth and living fully in harmony with it. Jesus had called and prepared the apostles to be sent as missionaries to the world. The final commission came later, but the preparation was almost complete.

In the third part of His prayer Christ prayed that believers would (1) be united; (2) be perfected into one; and (3) come to be with Him and see His glory (John 17:20-26). Christ prayed "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (John 17:21). Christ's praying for all believers was somewhat like a man praying for his own body, that he might have good use of it in work that requires good co-ordination; but the church is Christ's body to do His work in the world, and He is crippled by its disunity. Believers must be perfected into one body and one spirit if they are to serve well the one Lord, stand fast in the one truth, and show the world the one divine Savior.

The unity for which Christ prayed is not just any kind of union, but a specified kind and on a specified basis. It is to be personal, every individual united. It is to be spiritual, a harmony of mind, heart, and soul, and not enforced from without. It is to be visible, so that the world will be strongly influenced to believe because of it. Jesus desires the personal unity of each Christian with every other Christian. Such unity can be achieved only as each believer makes Christ the center of his faith and the authority for his life and religious matters.

O that the generations of believers that followed them might be perfected into one—they in the Lord and the Lord in them! Jesus' prayer was intensified by the fact that all His past labors, all His present sacrifice of Himself, and even His future joy, were involved in it. Who can read these outpourings of the deep and holy desires of our Savior without sadness and regret that we are so far from fulfilling His purpose and desire for us? Who can read without feeling that an unbelieving world is the dreadful price we pay for our sinful divisions?

Can we make ourselves and others desire unity of believers enough to pray for it like Jesus did and work for it like Paul? We are not likely to come near to accomplishing unity of Christians until we

want it very much, even more than we want our own way, more than we want to exalt ourselves. I hear much talk about unity and the need for it, and about the problems of division. There is much written about it. Sometimes it seems almost to be another subject like the weather: "Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it." In the prayers that I hear I do not discover that it is being prayed for very much; certainly not with the definiteness and fervent desire that Jesus expressed in His prayer. Brethren, let us learn to care, to pray, and to work that we "may be perfected into one; that the world may know that Jesus came from God" (John 17:23).

Why Must We Have Unity of Christians?

1. Jesus wants it that way. It should be enough that Christ prayed for unity of the church, who gave Himself for her, who will claim her for His bride, who will give to her all His inheritance.

2. The Holy Spirit through the apostles urged unity (I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 2:2; I Pet. 4:8-11).

3. The practice of division will condemn us (Gal. 5:20, 21; I Cor. 3:16, 17).

4. We are commanded to avoid or turn from those who cause division (Rom. 16:17, 18; Titus 3:10, 11; II John 9-11).

5. That the world may believe. Division among the churches makes it impossible for the schools to teach the certain truths of Christianity; and it gives to every common-school pupil the false impression that religion is not a matter of fixed truth, but only a matter of feelings and that every one makes his religion for himself, and it is just as respectable as any one else's religion. However much we may wish and agitate for the public schools to teach Christianity, they simply cannot do it while divisions continue to exist. The world discounts or disregards the testimony of a divided Christendom, just as we discount the so-called "scientific" conclusions which differ from and contradict one another while all are represented as "assured results." The less we care about contradictions in our testimony, the less the world cares about our affirmations. If it does not make any difference *what* one believes, it probably does not make any difference *whether* one believes. If one church is as good as another, possibly none is as good as any, since both statements rest upon the assumption that falsehood is as good as truth, disobedience as good as obedience.

6. Because division comes from putting human authority in the place of Christ. At least in some part it displaces Christ as the head of the church, and that is blasphemy (Eph. 1:20-23).

7. Because division comes from putting the words of men in the place of the infallible word of God. At least in some part it displaces the Holy Spirit as the revealer and spokesman of Jesus Christ and His covenant (I Cor. 2).

8. Because Christ is one and not divided. We cannot be perfectly united in and with Him without becoming united with each other. If we have the mind of Christ we will have the same mind, and so one through all the characteristics of the Christian which we receive from Christ Himself. Unity is natural and inherent in Christianity; and division among Christians misrepresents its nature.

9. Because division wastes and dissipates the energies and resources of evangelistic workers and supporters; furthermore, it turns a great bulk of religious effort from evangelism to party promotion and party regulation and party contentions. If all the printers' ink, if all the hours of study and conference, if all the money and men that have been employed to keep up human institutions had been used to bring men to their Savior, what glorious results might have been! As it is, five centuries of vigorous denominationalism leave the churches far from holding their own against the avowedly pagan world. "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Matt. 12:25).

To sum up, all the causes of division are sinful; all the results of division are shameful; all the characteristics of division misrepresent Christ and despoil the godly character. Surely division is of the devil and is his best implement for hindering the church from victory. The faith, devotion, obedience and brotherliness that produce unity are godly. The practice of unity is sweet and blessed (Ps. 133:1). The results of unity are faith and its glorious victory. Its goal is that all should be perfected into one in Christ. Can any man doubt that unity is of God and is a prerequisite to a victorious church?

What Is the Unity For Which Christ Prayed?

1. Jesus in His prayer describes it briefly, but exactly: "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee . . . that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:21, 22). This indicates the spiritual nature and extent of the unity He desires.

2. Such as the world can see: "that the world may believe" (John 17:21). To have this effect upon the world, unity would have to be visible. This does not mean that it would have to consist mainly of formal affiliation with religious organizations. Quite the contrary. A true unity in Christ will show in attitudes and practices without any organizational controls to centralize it. But it does mean it must

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be more than a claim of invisible unity which outward actions deny.

Christ manifested the goodness and righteousness of God and made it possible for us to be partakers of the divine nature and be united in the divine kind of unity that exists between the Father and Son. Such converted lives, united in the glory of godlikeness, will show the world that Jesus was really from God and that the love of God abides both in them and upon them (John 17:21-23).

3. A fellowship of those who are called of God and set apart for His name, to do His work by His Spirit, using His Word—all in every place "that are sanctified."¹ This includes all who come to Christ through God's word and according to God's plan (John 6:37-40). Jesus had made known the real character of God so that His name was understood and appreciated. His purpose was not that His disciples might have the right name on their meetinghouse, but that they might have the love of God in them.

4. It is such a vital relationship as is described by figure of the members of the body in relation to the head (I Cor. 12; Rom. 12:4, 5), or of the branches to the vine (John 15:5).

5. Such as existed in the apostolic church when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32).

6. Such as prompted the Gentile Christians to send help to Jewish Christians in time of need (II Cor. 8:1-9; especially verse 5).

7. Such as is indicated in the following words used in apostolic exhortations: "speak the same thing," "Be perfectly joined together," "same mind," "Like-minded," "same love," "of one accord," "preferring one another," and "with one accord and one mouth" (I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2; Rom. 12:10, 16; I Cor. 12:25, 26).

8. Such as is characterized by "one Lord," "one faith," "one baptism," "one body," "one Spirit," "one hope," "one God and Father over all, in all and through all" (Eph. 4:1-6).

Can any man imagine that the state of Christendom today is the unity that pleases the Lord?

Note particularly that it was unity in faith, "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." Jesus prayed that *those who believe* might be one. It was He that said, "but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Paul, who so earnestly urged the Corinthian brethren to unity and love, closes his great letter of correction with

¹ Study the word sanctify and its other forms with a concordance. See the article "Sanctification" by H. F. Rall in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1939), iv, Pp. 2681-2685.

this: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. 16:22). In Galatians 5:20-21 divisions under every name are condemned, but in Galatians 1:8, 9, Paul writes: "If any man preach unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema." In the first Epistle of John, Christian love and fellowship are upheld in their true nature and necessity, but in II John 9-11, Christians are strictly commanded to refuse fellowship to "anyone bringing not this teaching." Jesus commended the church at Ephesus because they could not endure evil men and did try false apostles (Rev. 2:2). He held it against the churches at Pergamos and at Thyatira that they had there some that held injurious teaching (Rev. 2:14-17, 20).

Unity of believers with unbelievers is so impossible that intermarriage of the two is not to be attempted (II Cor. 6:14—7:1). They could have a form of union, but not unity sanctified in Christ. "What portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" "Or what communion hath light with darkness?" How can we hope to promote true unity in Christ while we disregard Christ's will and harbor unbelievers within the fellowship? Study and apply the following scriptures: Romans 16:17-19; Galatians 1:6-9; Titus 1:9-16; Titus 3:10; I John 2:18-26; 4:1-6; Jude 3, 4; II Corinthians 10:3-5; 11:13-15; I Timothy 6:20, 21; II Timothy 3:5; Ephesians 5:7-12.

How Shall We Attain Christian Unity?

It can and should be attained among real believers. Unity is not unnatural to Christianity. Division is the unnatural, the abnormal state for Christians. Unity with rebels and unbelievers can never be accomplished. Hence, as long as the unbelievers pose as Christians it will not be possible for all nominal Christians to be united.

The description of unity implies the basis for it and the means of accomplishing it. Much study will be required for us to see all our misconceptions and remove all the hindrances and perfect all the details, but the general principles can be stated briefly and must be accepted before we can go further.

Unity must be in Christ. It is natural among those who accept Him and submit fully to His divine authority. Any other kind of unity is not only hopeless, but worthless. If all believe Him as He is revealed in the Spirit-inspired word of the New Testament, we will have "one faith." If all submit to Him, we will have "one Lord" (Eph. 4:4-6). The only way in which we can all "speak the same thing" is to speak what He has revealed in His word (I Cor. 1:10).

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We can and will be all one body if we will let Him be the only Head of each of us and let His will and mind and purpose work in and through us. We do not need to have the same gifts and accomplishments, nor the same thoughts and opinions in the things of which He has not spoken, but we must have our lives surrendered and every thought brought into subjection to Him.

Keeping Christ as its head, solely and completely, the church will preserve authority and purity, and will require of everyone just what Christ requires. It will also preserve liberty and require nothing but what Christ requires. We must have as much patience and mercy for one another as Christ has for us. Now especially we need to study carefully the application of Romans 14. The basis of Christian unity is unity of each individual with God. What unites a repentant sinner with Christ unites him with all other persons who are thus united with Christ.

In all matters on which the Bible has spoken plainly we can all believe alike if we will believe what it really means to say. In all things which the word of God has commanded we will practice alike if we obey Him. In all matters of doctrine or practice of which the word of God does not speak, we have no right to lord it over one another; and each may have his own opinion. Differences in this realm of opinion should not hinder our love for one another. In *faith* (believing what the Lord has said) let us have *unity*; in *opinion* (deciding what the Lord has not decided for us) let us have *liberty*; in obedience to Him *loyalty* and *faithfulness*: in all things *love*.

"He drew a circle that shut me out,
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;
But love and I had a mind to win,
We drew a circle that took him in."

"There are circles large and circles small,
To shut men out or to include them all,
The making of circles goes on and on,
But what of the circle that God has drawn?"

For Further Study:

Campbell, Thomas, "Declaration and Address" in *Documents Advocating Christian Union*, ed. by C. A. Young. Chicago: The Christian Century Co., 1904. Pp. 71-210. Available in printed form

THE FINAL WEEK

from Lincoln Christian College Bookstore, Lincoln, Ill. Carefully thought out program for Christians to follow in seeking to fulfill the unity of the Lord intended and established. Recently paraphrased by Knofel Staton and available in booklet form from College Press, Joplin, Missouri.

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THE PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY

God wants peace and harmony in His universe. He will not surrender the world to the forces of evil in order to have immediate peace at any price, but His ultimate object is to overcome all strife and enmity. His will is, not only that we should "live and let live," but that we should live together in mutual helpfulness, sharing our lives. He desires unity and fellowship between Himself and man, as well as between man and man. The greatest commandments of the old covenant were that we love God with all our being, and that we love our neighbors as ourselves (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36-40). The new commandment that Jesus gave His disciples is that we love one another as Christ has loved us (John 13:34). We are to bear "one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). "He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8-10; cp. James 2:8, 9).

It is wrong to think that we can be good Christians alone and indifferent to the lives and welfare of others, neglecting to come together in united expressions of faith and of worship to God through Christ. We are commanded to "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another" (Heb. 10:24, 25). We have a solemn request from Jesus, who died for us, that we participate in the breaking of bread in His memory, and that we all drink of the cup of the blood of the covenant (Matt. 26:27, 28). It seems that even nominally Christian people, those who think that they heed the Lord, just will not learn that He commanded us to worship Him and to love one another. The church makes a poor impression on the world while the majority of its members are notoriously indifferent to fellowship with Christ in His supper, and are torn by jealousy, strife, and faction, in which are "confusion and every vile deed" (James 3:16).

It is one of our fundamental failings, and the cause of many others, that we live so much by and for ourselves, forgetting God "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), spurning our divine friend, who would share His whole life and glory with us and live in us, and despising our fellow men—and we are often actively engaged in rebellion against God and conflict with men.

Understanding Fellowship and Unity

Fellowship is communion, participation, sharing—having valuable and significant things in common—having, feeling, and doing things together in mutual interest. When two lives become one in an ideal marriage, that is fellowship. The fellowship Christ wants us to have is like that between Himself and the heavenly Father, each finding the fulfillment of Himself in the other.

It is a fellowship of faith based upon the word of truth (John 17:8). It is sharing the same convictions and principles by believing the same truth (I John 1:3). Men have always been brought into that fellowship by the hearing and believing of the testimony about Jesus. Jesus prayed for the unity, not of all men as such, but of all that believe on Him through the apostles' word (John 17:20-23).

Our fellowship is with God and Christ (I John 1:3; John 17:21; I Cor. 1:19). Indeed, it has its basis in the reconciliation of the sinner to God. The uniting of the individual with Christ is what brings about the unity between individuals in Christ. It is participating in the death of Christ, by which He died my death, and in His resurrection (Rom. 6:2-11; II Cor. 5:14, 15; Gal. 2:20; 6:14). It is receiving within ourselves the mind and spirit of Christ, receiving for our inheritance the unsearchable riches of Christ's inheritance, and, in turn, yielding to Him this life for Him to live in and to work through.

Christian fellowship is the fruit of a regenerated heart. While it is commanded, it can not be produced by the mere force of commandment. It is unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). It can not be accomplished by organization or by uniformity of ritual or tradition. Rather, it is the natural expression of love. It must come from the heart and its inner desires. Fellowship is unity, and unity is fellowship. One makes the other; neither can be had without the other.

New Testament fellowship had concrete expression: (1) In "breaking down the middle wall of partition" between races and classes (Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 2:11-19); (2) in doing away with "respect of persons" because of wealth or worldly rank (James 2:1-9); (3) in effective co-ordination of the body in the work of building up itself "through that which every joint supplieth" (Rom. 12:3-7; Eph. 4:16); (4) in the important and difficult work of restoring or disciplining those who fall into sin (Gal. 6:1; II Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; I Cor. 5:11; II Cor. 2:6-11, etc.); (5) in giving and receiving material goods (Acts

4:32-35; Phil. 4:14-16; II Cor. 8:1-15; I Cor. 9:11-14); (6) in foregoing of rights and privileges for the protection of the weak, and in regard for the conscientious scruples of brethren (Rom. 14:13-20; 15:1-3; I Cor. 8:1-13); (7) in suffering persecution for Christ's sake and in ministering to those that were persecuted (Phil. 3:10; 4:14; Heb. 10:32-36; 13:3; I Pet. 2:21; 4:12-16; Rev. 1:9; II Tim. 2:10-12; 3:12; Rom. 8:17); (8) in public worship, praise, prayers, the Lord's Supper, and preaching—and in missionary reports.

Even on the night of His humiliation, in the hours of His great agony, Jesus' love directed His thoughts and prayers for others. He prayed for His apostles, who were with him, and for all who in any age believe in Him, for we all come to have our faith by their word (Rom. 10:17).

The earnest desire of the Lord, repeatedly expressed was that the believers might all be one, "as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21). He sought a real unity, and a unity of spirit, purpose, and principle; not a potential or superficial unity, He didn't just say to the world of men, "Now get together and co-operate." He called them unto Himself, gave them a foundation of revealed truth, gave them His name, gave them the glory and dignity of sonship, as adopted into the family of God. He strictly commanded us that we should love one another as He has loved us.

The express purpose for which He prayed was "that the world might believe" and "know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21, 23). The unity which He sought, then, as to show itself effectively to the world, and to help produce faith. We must confess with shame that instead of such unity today we have division that hinders faith notoriously.

Christ's prayer was that we might be united in Him—that all who believe Him should be perfectly one with Him and with one another in Him. He did not ask or intend that we should be joined together with unbelievers, or on any other basis than in Him. It is indeed pleasant and good for men to dwell together and work together in harmony, but the greatest, most blessed and really necessary unity is unity between a man and Christ. Shall we separate from God in order to unite with men? Or shall we not, rather, if necessary, separate from men to unite with God? He commands us to be holy and separated from the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11); to be not yoked with unbelievers (II Cor. 6:14-18); to avoid false teachers (Rom. 16:17; II Tim. 3:5); to refuse the factious (Titus

3:10); to partake not in the evil works of those who abide not in the teaching of Christ (II John 9-11); to try leaders and reject those who are not of God (I John 4:1-6; II Pet. 2:1-18; Acts 20:29-32; Gal. 1:8, 9; Rev. 2:2; Rev. 2:14, 20); to come out of and have no fellowship with counterfeit religion and the apostate church (Rev. 18:4). The Lord commands unity, and He commands separation. Let us say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah" (Josh. 24:15), even when it means total war with the Canaanites.

How the Apostles Handled a Threat to Unity

When the Lord led some in preaching the gospel to Gentiles and adding them to Christ without the law of Moses, the contrary view of some others causes no small contention. It was a great threat to unity of the church of Christ (Acts 15). It often seems to me that if Paul and his co-workers averted division in their generation, we certainly ought to be able to do so today.

To attain and maintain unity *we must care*. One great hindrance to unity is indifference to it. Let our complacency in division be gone! Let us heed Jesus' prayer, and join in it—fervently! Let us pray and seek and try to overcome the barriers and boundary lines that divide us. Unity is of the Spirit and of the heart. It will not come in full reality of expression until we want to draw near to one another in Christian love and fellowship—until we are pained at every discord.

Paul and Barnabas, and the others, were enough concerned to make long journeys and to examine the issue face to face with anyone to determine the Lord's will. They were not content to say, "I know I'm right. The others will have to come to me." As long as we are not enough concerned to take time, give thought, visit one another, and seek out the Lord's will together, we will not overcome the divisive issues that continually arise from ignorance and selfishness and unbelief.

Love is a necessity—with its expressions of mercy, forbearance, patience, preferment of others. Cold haughty exclusivism is as much misrepresentation and disloyalty to Christ as false teaching, and certainly a hindrance to unity. One form of it is officialism, which knows as brethren only those who submit to "official" oversight of men, and which co-operates only in contriving to "lord it over" the brethren. Those at the Jerusalem conference addressed their letter: "The brethren which are of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:23). Faith in Christ makes all men kind.

To have unity *we must all give our allegiance to one Lord*. First

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He gave Himself that we might have one common object of strong devotion, or authority for ultimate appeal, one redeemer on whom our lives depend. By being bound to Him we are bound to each other. When we fasten our hearts upon Him, He directs our affections to one another. There can be no great unity of men without Christ as the focal center and co-ordinator of it. Without individual consecration to Him, co-operation is unlikely and insignificant. When we love Him, we love and cooperate with those who serve and exalt Him (I John 5:1).

A united structure must have one foundation. We must have a common center around which to gather and arrange ourselves. To maintain unity of purpose and endeavor in the midst of diversity of talent and opportunity we must be coordinated by one supreme authority—the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:13-18; I Tim. 6:13-16). For this very reason we can not have unity in some council of churches among those who openly repudiate the authority of Christ and His word. The Jerusalem conference accomplished unity among these who accepted the will of Christ revealed through His apostles; but there were others who did not so accept the guidance of the Spirit in the apostles, and they are found later practicing division over circumcision and related matters of the law (Galatians).

To maintain unity *we must have a revelation of God's will*. The conference at Jerusalem was successful because the basis of their decision was this: "What has God revealed?" Peter presented the fact that God had sent His Spirit upon the uncircumcised, and "made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8, 9). Paul and Barnabas rehearsed the signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them. James showed that the scripture agreed. They were ready to accept the revealed will of God.

Even among men who acknowledged the same Lord, and who had a desire for unity, it was necessary for them to have clearly determined what the word of the Lord was regarding the matter that troubled them. Human wisdom is so diverse that the only way we could all speak the same thing is to speak the word of Christ just as He gave it. The letter sent from the Jerusalem meeting was not just their decision; it was the Holy Spirit's decision. This is of great importance. This conference does not set a precedent for us to meet and decide what we will without reference to the will of God.

God gave us His word that we might "speak the same thing" and

"be of the same mind" (I Cor. 1:10). We can not have real unity in faith, teaching, and practice without the possession and full use of the infallible word of divine revelation on all matters in which we are to be in perfect accord.

We can have a common faith, a unity of faith, in the divine word. "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Men's opinions differ, but all opinions must be subject to the word of God, (II Cor. 10:5), and opinions on other matters not expressly covered in the word of God do not have to be agreed one with another. The revelation of God covers all the essential principles and particular commandments necessary to bind our lives and our endeavors into one sweet symphony of harmony and peace, if we will accept it and keep opinions out of the way. Opinions and love of opinions is another great hindrance to unity, fostered by ignorance, selfishness and unbelief. The opinions that hurt most are those that rise in unbelief and should have been smothered by faith in the infallible word.

The threat to unity at Antioch was caused by (1) putting something else—traditions, human judgments—above Christ; (2) sincere zeal for God's word without proper understanding of it; (3) the tendency to set up themselves as a standard for others. Reverent heed to the Holy Spirit's revelation overcame all of these. But unbelief makes men fail to give full acceptance and obedience to Christ. They, then, are dependent on poor, fallible, variable human wisdom, and use it to separate from those who do believe and follow Christ.

Unbelief and ignorance may produce false convictions with all attendant zeal and firm resistance. These are often not so much from conscious rejection of the scripture as from misunderstanding or incomplete acceptance of it, on account of prejudice. Such convictions are common, are a real barrier to unity, and must be dealt with in overcoming division. Here we see the need of a humble spirit and constant study of the word of God, with special care not to go beyond the things that are written. Among believers who have accepted Christ upon His own simple terms, we must receive one another, "not for decision of scruples" (Romans 14). As long as men's opinions do not seriously hinder their submission to Christ and to the express requirements of His word, we may tolerate some of them that we can not approve. "To his own lord he standeth or falleth."

Intolerance can cause division, but tolerance alone can never bring unity such as Christ prayed for.

To maintain unity we must keep central the redeeming work of

Christ. He gave us His covenant of redeeming love, bought and sealed with His own blood, that we might have our hope and security in Him, might realize that we are helpless and condemned by ourselves, and might be humbled by the price that was paid for us.

He gave us a share in the glorious work and grave responsibility of bringing the men of the world to this salvation through faith in the Savior. He commissioned us to propagate this word of truth, not merely impersonally, but with personal concern for souls to be saved and brethren to be edified by it. In the work, we are to coordinate our diverse gifts and natures into one body, expressing not ourselves but the will of Christ and the power of His Spirit to regenerate and to sanctify. The discharge of our responsibility and the accomplishment of the Lord's purpose demand that we submit ourselves perfectly to Him, "subjecting ourselves one to another in fear of Christ" (Eph. 5:21), that His one Spirit may animate the one body to the glory of Christ and the saving of the world. A house divided against itself can not stand (Matt. 12:25). Our fellowship must not be marred by disunity; it must not be a matter of mere formal felicitation, or even of cooperation in only temporal and material interests. It must be real unity in Christ's special work of making men children of God by the new birth.

As a constant teacher and reminder of these things, He has given us the communion supper by which we express continually our participation in His death for us, and in which we may unite in genuine fellowship of faith and worship. It should so strengthen our allegiance to Jesus and our affectionate gratitude to Him that we will be drawn closer to our brethren in Him. It puts to shame all our pride and brings us all to one common level before the cross of redemption.

Principles for the Practice of Christian Unity

I would summarize the most basic practices for the promotion of Christian unity:

1. Unlimited surrender to one Lord, Christ Jesus, the Son of God. As in international affairs some men are seeking to attain peace and united actions by the surrender of the sovereignty of nations to the United Nations, so in religious affairs some campaign for the surrender of local autonomy of congregations to the decisions (i.e., the rule) of centralized authorities in agency headquarters or conventions; and some plead for the surrender of everyone (from individuals to whole denominations) to the leadership of great councils of churches. It is my humble opinion that the nations would find a ready basis

for a just and lasting peace, if they would truly acknowledge the sovereignty of God and do His will. I am convinced that the people of all Christendom could find a sure basis for unity if they would seek it through obedience to Christ alone as Lord over all things pertaining to the church.

2. No glorying except in Him; no loyalty binding our hearts so that it can operate against His will or against the fellowship of His people. If this seems impossible, then our allegiance to Him must be so strong that it always overrules every other.

3. Love for all who are His, because He commands it, and because His love is shed abroad in our hearts. This does not mean that we always have to determine just who is His. We can love men for their intention to be His, and help them to fulfill it.

4. To make unity, make *believers* in Christ, but do not try to standardize them according to our opinions or human traditions. All our efforts to control them, confess our failure to convert them. Unity increases as we increase in genuine faith and the practice of it. Christianity is made to run on faith and love, as a Chevrolet is made to run on gasoline; and it will not run without them. Obviously this is not merely an affirmation of doctrine, but a faith that acts upon complete confidence in the Lord and His word. Let me say it this way: Faith is not holding to ideas regardless of our inability to prove them; but faith is following the Lord Jesus regardless of the consequences and in spite of our inability to see where He is leading us. We do this, because He has proved Himself to be trustworthy, because of the evidence that He is the conqueror of death, the living Son of God; the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

5. Study diligently the Bible as the source of truth and light, as the way of life and felicity. God knows the commandments, the attitudes, and the practices that will lead men into unity. In fact, He has revealed them. Of course, this presupposes that the Bible is a revelation of the will of God, the wisdom and the truth which God gave to men. The Bible makes this very claim for itself in many statements and in many indirect ways. The Bible's teaching about unity is based upon the Bible's claim to authority. We cannot have one without the other.

6. A basic requirement for unity is an attitude of humility and love that seeks to help others instead of the judging attitude that withdraws from all whom we do not approve. Look again at Ephesians 4:2: "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love," is part of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace.

We must receive imperfect brethren. That is the only kind there is. We have no right to devise any tests of fellowship. We are not authorized to draw a line of fellowship; we must simply discover where Jesus drew the line. We must determine how Jesus identifies a man with Himself, how He calls one into the fellowship. Then we must receive our brothers in Christ as Christ receives us. We have no right to choose our brothers. Realizing our imperfections, let us humbly seek God's forgiveness and God's corrective guidance.

Romans 12 and Romans 14 have much important teaching for the promotion of peace and unity. First be fully consecrated to Christ. Think not too highly of self. Recognize the differing gifts of God in different brethren. Love not in word only. Feel family affection for one another. In honor prefer one another. Pray for one another. Be helpful and sharing in all circumstances. Send forth blessing even to those that oppose you. Don't retaliate if men disapprove you. Take care for the welfare and the good conscience of every brother. Unity is in the mind, in the way we think toward one another; and it requires humility. There is nearly always pride in division. Our life must be a confession of Jesus Christ, not a profession of our excellence or loyalty to Him.

There will be differences of opinion and practice. We must face them as brothers, not enemies. We must settle them as servants of the same Lord, following the same instructions from on high. Differences must be occasions for discussion and study, not for division. Regard division not as an instrument for purifying the church, but as a weapon for destroying it. Listen to one another, study together as equals with very much in common. No one has a right to despise another who is purchased by Christ's blood and born into the family of God.

7. II Timothy 2:14-26 teaches that we must shun vain disputes and foolish questionings, profane babblings and strife about words to no profit. "The Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves." Yet the church is to be warned against false teachings. We need leaders in local churches who take seriously their responsibility to lead in teaching sound doctrine and rejecting false doctrines.

8. We need to act from strictly non-sectarian motives to do Christ's will. Fellowship is not only a matter of theory or of sentiment, but there is a very important realm of practice, participating together

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in Christian works. Let us show that we belong to Christ, not to any party. Let us claim no other people but all of Christ's people. Let us recognize every work of Christ as our work, and participate in it for His sake as far as we have opportunity, without caring who gets the credit. If we judge that some work is not what Christ wants done, let us refrain from it, regardless of who urges us, not following human leaders as if we belonged to them, not compromising Christ's authority, His word, or our allegiance to Him for the favor of men or the promotion of human glory for anybody. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). Do all as His agents, taught by His word, impelled by love and devotion to Him, subject to His approval, His favor, and His help. Let Him over-rule our plans and modify our efforts wherever they fail to uphold the fellowship of His whole body or where they hinder other portions of His work.

When people who intend to be Christians are not of one heart and soul, it is because they have something else binding them other than Christ.

When Christ comes again to separate the sheep from the goats, to take the saints, living and dead, to dwell with Him forever, we will all want to be in that one body. We are now too much interested in getting members in our congregations and organizations, but not enough concerned for all the saints who belong to Christ. Pray, work, and study; find the nature of our divisions, learn the causes of them for which we need to repent; develop a climate of repentance of the sin of division. Be honest in facing our own faults and the obstacles to unity. Set Christ's aims, spiritual aims for individual lives, far above institutional goals, or entirely in place of them, putting real Christianity above all kinds of conformity to human customs. Cultivate a desire for all the unity that is possible within the limitations of the revealed will of Christ, the Head of the Church.

For Further Study:

See books listed on pages 419-420.