

The Unity of the Spirit

February 16th, 2016, Kichijouji Bible Study
Gotthold Beck

御霊の一致

2016年2月16日、吉祥寺学び会

ゴットホルド・ベック

Ephesians

1:19 ...his mighty strength,

1:20 which he brought about in the Messiah when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realm.

1:21 He is far above every ruler, authority, power, dominion, and every name that can be named, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

1:22 God has put everything under the Messiah's feet and has made him the head of everything for the good of the church,

1:23 which is his body, the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way.

[International Standard Version]

4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to live in a way that is worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

4:2 demonstrating all expressions of humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another in love.

4:3 Do your best to maintain the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace.

I would like to pick up the words of the Lord from Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 3, for the sake of our discussion today. In particular, I want to focus on the sentence in the first part of this verse, "do your best to maintain the unity of the Spirit" and discuss its significance with you.

I believe that the unity of the Spirit can only be attained when the Holy Spirit dwells within us and completely controls us. When we are completely embraced and controlled by the Holy Spirit, we obtain the unity of the Spirit, which is mentioned in the New Testament.

To help us understand the unity of the Spirit, the Bible takes the human body as an example. All limbs and organs that make up our body are connected through, and governed by, the nervous system, and it is the head that controls that entire nerve network. All organs and all the limbs of our body are controlled by the head through our nervous system.

More than fifty years ago, our second daughter was born with a birth defect called Spina bifida, or split

spine. It is a peculiar disease which causes a bone of the spine to be split vertically.

Through this disease, we came to understand very well the importance of the nervous system in the human body. In the case of our daughter, it was diagnosed that a few nerves protruded from the crack in her spine, which affected the functioning of her stomach and weakened the work of her bowels. The doctor who helped her those days, who was a physician from Germany, told me that she would not feel anything even if he stuck a needle into her foot.

I see some Christians living today under such miserable conditions. That is to say, they have become so insensitive to the whispers of the Holy Spirit. The eyes of their heart are totally closed to the guidance of the Spirit. Therefore, these people are no longer able to live according to the words of God—their lives of faith have failed and they cannot move in a positive direction anymore.

It is stressed in the Bible that the intentions of Jesus are not only in preaching the Gospel or in supporting the life of the believers in this world, but he is also looking at the churches which represent his body. As Jesus is the central focus of the entire Bible, and its leading player, his intention is undoubtedly focused on churches, which are the body of the Lord Jesus himself, the fullness of the one who fills everything in every way.

We can say that the nervous system of churches as Jesus' body are the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the unity of the Holy Spirit exists only where there are souls sensitive enough to show quick response to all the whispers of the Holy Spirit, no matter how subtle they are—these are the broken and sincere souls which are prepared to obey all the demands of Jesus as their head. So, let us lay our eyes on three key ideas.

First of all, in the Bible, in the selection from Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 3 we just read, we are told to do our best to maintain the unity of the Spirit. However, it goes without saying that it is not possible to maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit unless it first exists among us. Therefore, the prerequisite to maintaining the unity of the Spirit is that we first have the Spirit dwell in us and surrender ourselves to the dominance and the total control of the Spirit.

Secondly, the unity of the Holy Spirit can never be attained by human effort. We may successfully share the confessions of our faith, we may belong to the same church, we may compromise on the interpretations of the Bible with each other and we may

cooperate in our practical service to the Lord with others, but although these things may help us to have a unity in the social meaning, it will never bring the unity of the Holy Spirit to us.

Thirdly, the unity of the Holy Spirit may possibly be accompanied with a paradox. The meaning of peace, mentioned in the Bible, is for us to be harmonized, to live in cooperation and be united with each other. And it is well known that Jesus is called the Prince of Peace in the Bible. This means that when our dearest Lord Jesus begins dwelling in our hearts, the peace of the Lord God also comes along into our hearts. However, here is the paradox, for the Bible says that wherever Jesus comes, a sword is also brought. Let us look at this verse:

Matthew

10:34 Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword!

So said Jesus. Here, the cross of Jesus is seen to our eyes as the symbol of the war against the attacks of the devil. If this cross separates the soul and the spirit of believers, it will inevitably bring terrible ordeals and pains to them. This world, and the flesh, take every form, and use all kinds of expressions in order to destroy and spoil the spiritual unity among us.

All things that spring out of our innate nature, including our own judgments, evaluations, motives, methods, and measures hinder the unity of the Holy Spirit and cause us to lose that unity. All our judgments, evaluations, motives, methods and measures must be constantly placed under the control of the Holy Spirit. As the cross of Jesus stands firm in our lives, it makes us feel as if we are facing more confrontations with the world and it is getting stronger.

In this battle, the separation between the soul and the spirit must be accomplished in ourselves, in our homes as well as in churches; in other words, the desire to realize our own intentions and purpose needs to be separated from the intentions of the Holy Spirit. We have to fight against the desire to realize our own purpose instead of the purpose of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit and the flesh are mixed up in the unity, such unity will sooner or later, fail.

The weapon the devil uses to prevent the unity of the Holy Spirit to occur is the spirit and flesh of this world. The flesh represents all things that refuse the control of the Holy Spirit, the clean Spirit. It includes, for example, our own thoughts, our own plan, our own reasoning and our own motives. The unity of the Spirit is possible through nothing but the cross. Because it is through the cross alone that we can bring ourselves to

nothing.

The unity of the Spirit that is born of the Cross needs to be maintained by all means. "Maintain the unity of the Spirit," thus we are not encouraged, but we are commanded. I would like to go through seven important points that revolve around this command.

[1] The Spirit has only one purpose. Therefore, as a matter of principle, it is impossible for believers to have totally different opinions from each other (and yet be in the unity). If two believers are separated in their thoughts, one must be right and the other one must be wrong.

[2] The Holy Spirit is the one who owns the everlasting and absolute truth. Some people say that the guidance of the Spirit changes with the times. But, this is not true. The truth never changes as time goes by. It remains forever. So does the guidance of the Spirit.

[3] Having different status among believers does not become the obstacle to the unity of the Spirit. That is to say, the difference in ages, or the degree in their spiritual growth, does not hinder the unity of the Spirit among them.

[4] If there is a fundamental difference of opinions among the believers, it means that the fellowship among them will be significantly limited and it gives the devil a chance to take advantages of such differences.

[5] We will have to throw away our own righteousness and should stop trying to pursue our own benefits. Sometimes, showing an adamant attitude leads to various limitations in many aspects of our lives. Nevertheless, we need to overcome such fears and stand firm against this world. Compromised service to the Lord will eventually reach a dead end. The time will come to dissolve relationships with those who kneel down to Baal.

[6] The unity of the Spirit is possible through Jesus alone. It is not attainable through fear. Our own ego needs to be dominated by the Lord, which is the foundation required for our spiritual unity.

[7] In the spiritual houses of the Lord God, that is to say, in the true churches, nothing else matters other than the commands and the orders of the Lord.

Let me go back to the story of our daughter. One night of fifty something years ago, we received a telegram from Doctor Eidel, a German physician who worked at the International Catholic Hospital in Tokyo. It was simply written, "Your baby is healed." In those days, we lived in the town of Naka-Minato of Ibaragi prefecture

and called him in Tokyo. We could not believe what we heard at all. We were told that, the swelling in her back, which was caused by the oozing of lymph fluid from the crack in her spine suddenly diminished in size. The crack in her split bone was closed, which caused her paralyzed legs began to move and the functions of her stomach and bowels were completely recovered.

It was something the specialist physician had never experienced before and he was totally astonished. All nurses at the International Catholic Hospital were as pleased as if it was their own body that was recovered. We felt the same joy that Abraham had when he could take back Isaac when he was offered as a burnt offering.

The Lord still does miracles. Shouldn't we all believe in this fact? May the unity of the Spirit that is given by the Lord be here among us. Let us throw away our own thoughts and desires, and instead surrender ourselves to the control of the Spirit, so that the Spirit may guide us each every moment of our lives. Let us walk as in the German hymn we used to sing, which went, "not the flesh, not the flesh, but the Spirit, may the Spirit be our only ruler." And let us sincerely hope to serve the Lord together.

When all these things are realized, I believe that we all will be able to crucify ourselves every day, lead the life guided by the Spirit, and finally understand the secret of the churches, the body of the Lord, which were perfected by the Lord Jesus when he was raised to heaven.

End