

“Be Diligent to Preserve the Unity of the Spirit”
(Ephesians 4:3)

YOU will remember that for several years I have received my morning’s text for the first Sabbath in the year from an esteemed brother, a clergyman of the Church of England. This year he very kindly sends me this verse, which I hope will be useful to us all, reminding us of our former faults, and of our present duty in the matter of “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The Pope has lately been most lustily cursing us all. According to his nature, of course, must be his utterances. We could not expect a blessing where no blessing abides; and, if we get a curse, we only receive a polluted stream from a polluted fountain. It is an old saying that England never prospers so well, as when the Pope curses her. I hope to see a year of great prosperity this year. Let the poor deluded priest curse as long as he will, our God shall turn it into a blessing. In former days, when some of the Churches of Christ began to shake off the yoke of Popedom from their necks, the plea urged against reformation was the necessity of maintaining unity. “Ye must bear with this ceremony and that dogma; no matter how antichristian and unholy, you must bear with it, ‘endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.’” So spake the old serpent in those early days. “The Church is one; woe unto those who shall create schism! It may be true that Mary is set up in the place of Christ, that images are worshipped, cast clouts and rotten rags adored, and pardons bought and sold for crimes of every kind; it may be that the so-called Church has become an abomination and a nuisance upon the face of the earth; but still,

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‘endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,’ you must lie down, restrain the testimony of the Spirit of God within you, keep his truth under a bushel, and let the lie prevail.” This was the grand sophistry of the Church of Rome. When, however, she could not seduce men by talking of love and union, she took upon herself to use her natural tone of voice, and cursed right and left right heartily: and let her curse till she expires! Brethren, there was no force in the argument of the Papist, if you will look at the text for a moment: the text bids us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit, but it does not tell us to endeavor to maintain the unity of evil, the unity of superstition, or the unity of spiritual tyranny. The unity of error, of false doctrine, of priestcraft, may have in it the spirit of Satan; we do not doubt that; but that it is the unity of the Spirit of God we do utterly deny. The unity of evil we are to break down by every weapon which our hand can grasp: the unity of the Spirit which we are to maintain and foster is quite another thing. Remember that we are forbidden to do evil that good may come. But it is to do evil; to restrain the witness of the Spirit of God within us; to conceal any truth which we have learned by revelation of God; to hold back from testifying for God’s truth and Word,

against the sin and folly of man's inventions, would be sin of the blackest hue. We dare not commit the sin of quenching the Holy Spirit, even though it were with the view of promoting unity. But the unity of the Spirit never requires any sinful support; that is maintained not by suppressing truth, but by publishing it abroad. The unity of the Spirit has for its pillars, among other things, the witnessing of spiritually enlightened saints to the one faith which God has revealed in his Word. That is quite another unity which would gag our mouths and turn us all into dumb driven cattle, to be fed or slaughtered at the will of priestly masters. Dr. McNeil has, very properly, said that a man can scarcely be an earnest Christian in the resented day without being a controversialist. We are sent forth to-day as sheep in the midst of wolves: can there be agreement? We are kindled as lamps in the midst of darkness: can there be concord? Hath not Christ himself said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword?" You understand how all this is the truest method of endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit; for Christ the man of war, is Jesus the Peacemaker; but in order to the creation of lasting, spiritual peace, the phalanx of evil must be broken, and the unity of darkness dashed to shivers. I pray God evermore to preserve us from a unity in which truth shall be considered valueless, in which principle gives place to policy, in which the noble and masculine virtues which adorn the Christian hero are

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to be supplemented by an effeminate affectation of charity. May the Lord deliver us from indifference to his word and will; for this creates the cold unity of masses of ice frozen into an iceberg, chilling the air for miles around: the unity of the dead as they sleep in their graves, contending for nothing, because they have neither part nor lot in all that belongs to living men. There is a unity which is seldom broken, the unity of devils, who, under the service of their great liege master, never disagree and quarrel: from this terrible unity keep us, O God of heaven! The unity of locusts who have one common object, the glutting of themselves to the ruin of all around, the unity of the waves of Tophet's fire, sweeping myriads into deeper misery: from this also, O King of heaven, save us evermore! May God perpetually send some prophet who shall cry aloud to the world "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand." May there ever be found some men, though they be rough as Amos, or stern as Haggai, who shall denounce again and again all league with error and all compromise with sin, and declare that these are the abhorrence of God. Never dream that holy contention is at all a violation of my text. The destruction of every sort of union which is not based on truth, is a preliminary to the edification of the unity of the Spirit. We must first sweep away these walls of untempered mortar — these tottering fences of man's building — before there can be room to lay the goodly stones of Jerusalem's walls one upon the other for lasting and enduring prosperity. In this spirit have I spoken to clear a way to reach my text.

It is clear from the text, that there is a unity of the Spirit to be kept,

secondly, that it needs keeping; and, thirdly, that a bond is to be used. When we have enlarged upon these points, we shall use the text in its practical application, first to Christians in their connection with other Churches, and then to members of the same Church in their connection with each other.

I. First, THERE IS A UNITY OF THE SPIRIT OF WHICH THE TEXT SPEAKS, WHICH IS WORTHY TO BE KEPT.

You will observe it is not an ecclesiastical unity, it is not endeavoring to keep the unity of the denomination, the community, the diocese, the parish — no, it is “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.” Men speak of the Episcopal Church, the Wesleyan Church, or the Presbyterian Church. Now I hesitate not to say that there is nothing whatever in Scripture at all

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parallel to such language; for there I read of the seven Churches in Asia, the Church in Corinth, Philippi, Antioch, etc. In England, if I speak according to the Word of God, there are some thousands of Churches holding the episcopal form of government; in Scotland, some thousands of godly Churches ordered according to Presbyterian rule; among the Wesleyans, Churches adhering to the form of government first carried out by Mr. Wesley; but it is not according to the method of Scripture but only according to human invention to speak of a whole cluster of Churches as one Church. Although myself much inclined to a Presbyterian union among our Churches, I cannot but perceive in Holy Scripture that each Church is separate and distinct from every other Church; the whole being connected by those divers bonds and ligaments which keep all the separate members together, but not so connected as to run into one another to lose their separateness and individuality. There is nothing in Scripture which says, “Endeavouring to keep up your ecclesiastical arrangements for centralization;” but the exhortation runs thus: “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit.”

Again, you will observe it does not say, “Endeavouring to keep the uniformity of the Spirit.” The Spirit does not recognize uniformity. The analogy of his work in nature is against it. The flowers are not all tinted with the same hue, nor do they exhale the same odours. There is variety everywhere in the work of God. If I glance at providence, I do not perceive that any two events happen after the same form — the page of history is varied. If, therefore, I look into the Church of God, I do not expect to find that all Christians pronounce the same shibboleth, or see with the same eyes. The same, “one Lord one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, we rejoice to recognize; but as to uniformity of dress, liturgical verbiage, or form of worship, I find nothing of it in Scripture. Men may pray acceptably standing, sitting, kneeling, or lying with their faces upon the earth; they may meet with Jesus by the river’s side, in the temple porch, in a prison, or in a private house; and they may be one in the same Spirit although the one regardeth a day, and the other regardeth it not.

But what is this unity of the Spirit? I trust, dear brethren, that we know it

by having it in possession; for it is most certain that we cannot keep the unity of the Spirit, if we have it not already. Let us ask ourselves the question, "Have we the unity of the Spirit?" None can have it but those who have the Spirit, and the Spirit dwells only in new-born believing souls. By virtue of his having the Spirit, the believer is in union with every other
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spiritual man, and this is the unity which he is to endeavor to keep. This unity of the Spirit is manifested in love. A husband and wife may be, through providence, cast hundreds of miles from one another, but there is a unity of spirit in them because their hearts are one. We, brethren, are divided many thousands of miles from the saints in Australia, America, and the South Sea, but loving as brethren, we feel the unity of the Spirit. I was never a member of a Church meeting in the backwoods of America; I never worshipped God with the Samoans, or with my brethren in New Zealand; but notwithstanding all this, I feel the unity of the Spirit in my soul with them, and everything which concerns their spiritual welfare is interesting to me.

This unity of the Spirit is caused by a similarity of nature. Find a drop of water glittering in the rainbow, leaping in the cataract, rippling in the rivulet, lying silent in the stagnant pool, or dashing in spray against the vessel's side, that water claims kinship with every drop of water the wide world over, because it is the same in its elements; and even so there is a unity of the Spirit which we cannot imitate, which consists in our being "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," bearing in us the Holy Ghost as our daily quickener, and walking in the path of faith in the living God. Here is the unity of spirit, a unity of life, nature working itself out in love. This is sustained daily by the Spirit of God. He who makes us one, keeps us one. Every member of my body must have a communion with every other member of my body. I say must. The question never arises, that I know of, between the members of my body whether they will do so or not. As long as there is life in my frame, every separate portion of my body must have communion with every other portion of it. Here is my finger — I may discolour it with some noxious drug; my head may not approve of the staining of my finger; my head may suggest a thousand ways by which that finger ought to be put through a purgation, and this may be all right and proper; but my head never says, "I will cut off that finger from communion." My tongue speaks loudly against the noxious fluid which has done my finger mischief and has blistered it so as to cause pain to the whole body, yet the head cannot say, "I will have that finger cut off," unless the body is willing to be for ever mutilated and incomplete. Now, it is not possible to mutilate the body of Christ. Christ does not lose his members or cast off parts of his mystical body. And therefore it never ought to enter the head of any Christian man whether or not he shall have communion in spirit with any other Christian,
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for he cannot do without it: as long as he lives he must have it. This does not check him in boldly denouncing the error into which his brother may

have fallen, or in avoiding his intimate acquaintance while he continues to sin; but it does forbid the thought that we can ever really sever any true believer from Christ, or even from us, if we be in Christ Jesus.

The unity of the Spirit is preserved, then, by the Holy Ghost infusing daily life-floods into the one mystical body; and in proportion as the life-floods become more strong, that union becomes more manifest. Let a spirit of prayer be poured out on all our Churches, conventionalities will be dashed down, divisions will be forgotten, and locked in each others arms, the people of God will show to the world that they are one in Christ Jesus.

There are some points in which this unity of the Spirit is certain to discover itself. In prayer, how truly does Montgomery put it: —

*“The saints in prayer appear as one
In word, and deed, and mind,
While with the Father and the Son,
Sweet fellowship they find.”*

There is a unity of praise too. Our hymn books differ after all very little; we still sing the same song, the praise of the same Savior. This unity will soon discover itself in co-working: they have a union in their conflict with the common foe, and in their contention for the common truth. This will lead to communion — I do not mean sitting down to the same table to eat bread and drink wine — that is only the outward union — but I mean that communion which consists in heart beating true to heart, and in the feeling, that they are one in Christ Jesus. It was a motto with Bucer, “To love all in whom be could see anything of Christ Jesus.” Be this your motto, brother in Christ. Make not your love an excuse for not offering stern rebuke, but rebuke because you love. Some persons think that unless you smooth your tongue and cover your words with sugar, no matter though it may be sugar of lead — unless you cringe, and compliment, and conceal, there is no love in your heart; but I trust it will be our privilege to show in our own persons, some of us, how sternly we can dissent and yet love; how truly be Nonconformists to our brethren’s error, and yet in our very nonconformity prove our affection to them, and to our common Master. It is said of some men that they appear to have been born upon the mountains of Bether, for they do nothing but cause division; and baptized in the waters of Meribah, for they delight in causing strife. This is not the case with the genuine

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Christian; he cares only for the truth, for his Master, for the love of souls; and when these things are not imperilled, his own private likes or dislikes never affect him. He loves as much to see another Church prosper as his own: so long as he can know that Christ is glorified it is a matter of comparative indifference to him by what minister God’s arm is made bare, in what place souls are converted, or to what particular form of worship men addict themselves: yet ever does he hold to this, that there is no unity of the Spirit where there is a lie in the case; that where the souls of men are concerned he would be a traitor to God if he did not bear witness against the error which damns, and testify to the truth which saves; and where the crown jewels of his Masters kingdom are concerned he dares not

traitorously hold his tongue; but though his fellow-subjects cast his name out as evil, he counts it all joy so long as he is faithful to his Master and discharges his conscience as before the Judge of quick and dead.

II. Secondly, THIS UNITY NEEDS KEEPING.

It is a very difficult thing to maintain, and that for several reasons. Our sins would, very naturally, break it. If we were all angels, we should keep the unity of the Spirit, and not need even the exhortation to do so; but, alas! we are proud, and pride is the mother of division. Diotrephes, who loves to have the pre-eminence, is very sure to head a faction. Envy, too, how that separated very friends! When I cannot be satisfied with anything which is not hammered on my anvil or run in my mould; when another man's candle grieves me because it gives more light than mine; and when another man troubles me because he has more grace than I have — oh! there is no unity in this case. Anger — what a deadly foe is that to unity! when we cannot brook the smallest disrespect; when the slightest thing brings the blood into our face; when we speak unadvisedly with our lips: but surely I need not read the long list of sins which spoil this unity of the Spirit, for they are legion. O, may God cast them out from us, for only so can we keep the unity of the Spirit. But, beloved, our very virtues may make it difficult for us to keep this unity. Luther is brave and bold, hot and impetuous; he is just the man to lead the van and clear the way for the Reformation. Calvin is logical, clear, cool, precise; he seldom speaks rashly. It is not in the order of things that Luther and Calvin, should always agree. Their very virtues cause them to fall out, and, consequently, Luther, in a bad temper, calls Calvin a pig, and a

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devil; and, albeit, Calvin once replied, "Luther may call me what he will, but I will always call him a dear servant of Christ," yet John Calvin knew how to pierce Luther under the fifth rib when he was in the humor. In those days the courtesies of Christians to one another were generally of the iron-gauntlet order, rather than the naked hand; for all were so much called to war for the sake of the truth; that even their fellow soldiers were treated with suspicion; and it may be with us that the very watchfulness of truth, which is so valuable, may make us suspect where there is no need for suspicion, and our courage may take us as sometimes a fiery horse has carried a young warrior beyond where he intended to have ridden, where he may be taken prisoner to his own damage. We must watch, the best of us must watch lest we fight the Lord's battles with Satan's weapons, and so even from love to God and his truth, violate the unity of the Spirit. The unity of the Spirit ought to be kept, dear friends, because Satan is so busy to mar it. He knows that the greatest glory of Christ will spring from the unity of his Church. "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." There is no Church happiness where there is not Church unity. Let a Church be disaffected and divided, the schism in the body is death to all hallowed fellowship. We cannot enjoy communion

with each other unless our hearts be one. Our work for God, how feebly is it done when we are not agreed! The enemy cannot desire a better ally than strife in the midst of our camp. “Can ye not agree,” said a warrior of old “when your enemy is in sight!” Christians, can you not agree to keep the unity of the Spirit when a destroying Satan is ever on the watch seeking to drag immortal souls down to perdition? We must be more diligent in this matter; we must seek to purge out from ourselves everything which would divide, and to have in our hearts every holy thought which would tend to unite us with our brethren. I am not, when I join a Christian Church, to say, “I am quite certain I shall never break its unity.” I am to suspect myself of a liability to that evil, and I am to watch with all diligence that I keep the unity of the Spirit.

III. In the third place, in order to the keeping of this, THERE IS A BOND PROVIDED, THE BOND OF PEACE.

Beloved, there should be much peace, perfect peace, unbounded peace between the people of God. We are not aliens; we are “fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Realize your fellow-citizenship;
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treat not Christian people as foreigners, and this bond of fellow-citizenship will be one bond of peace. You are not enemies. Men may be fellowcitizens and yet hate one another, but you are friends, you are all friends to Christ, and in him you are all friends to one another; let that be another bond. But you go farther; you are not mere friends, you are brethren, born of the same parent, filled with the same life; and shall not this be a bond? See that ye fall not out by the way; strive not one with another, for ye are brethren. This is not all; you are nearer than this; you are members of the same body. Shall this mysterious union fail to be a bond of peace to you? Wilt thou, being the foot, contend with the eye? or wilt thou, being the eye, contend with the hand, and say, “I have no need of thee”? If it be indeed the truth, and not a fiction, that we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones — since the joints and bones in other men’s bodies do not disagree, let it never be said of the mystical body of our blessed Lord, that there was such a monstrous thing in it, that the various parts would not cwork, but, fell to battling one with another.

I believe I have brought out the meaning of the text. There is a unity of the Spirit which is worthy to be kept — we ought to keep it — we must try to keep it in the bond of peace.

To come to the practical conclusion of the subject. First, in the connection of one Church with another; and, secondly, in the connection of one Church member with another.

It is not a desirable thing that all Churches should melt into one another and become one; for the complete fusion of all Churches into one ecclesiastical corporation would inevitably produce another form of Popery, since history teaches us that large ecclesiastical bodies grow more or less corrupt as a matter of course. Huge spiritual corporations are, as a whole, the strongholds of tyranny and the refuges of abuse; and it is only a

matter of time when they shall break to pieces. Disruption and secession must occur, and will occur, where a unity is attempted which is not meant in God's Word; but it will be a blessed thing when all the Churches walk together in the unity of the Spirit when this Church, although it has been baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ, and laments the neglect of that ordinance by others, yet feels that the unity of the Spirit is not to be broken, and holds out its right hand to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; when yonder Church, governed by its elders, feels a unity with another Church which is presided over by its bishop; when a certain

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Church, which holds with mutual edification and no ministry, is yet not quarrelsome towards those who love the ministry of the Word; when, in fact, we have agreed in this one thing, that we will search the Word independently and act out according to our light what we find to be true; but having so done we will keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace. I say this is most desirable and this it is that we are to seek after; not the fusion of all into one denomination, but the keeping of each Church in its own distinct independent testimony in love with every other Church that is doing the same.

Now, in order to this, I have a few suggestions to offer. It is quite certain we shall never keep the unity of the Spirit if this Church shall declare that it is superior to every other. If there be a Church which says, "We are the Church, and all others are mere sects; we are established, and others are only tolerated;" then it is a troubler in Israel, and must hide its head when the unity of the Spirit is so much as hinted at. Any Church which lifts up its head on high and boasts over other Churches has violated the unity of the Spirit. If other Churches reply, "One is our Master and all we are brethren," they do not violate the unity of the Spirit, for they simply claim their rights and speak the truth. That other Church which forgets its true position as one in the family, and begins to set itself up as mistress, and claim pre-eminence over its fellow-servants, has put it out of its own power to keep the unity of the Spirit, for it has violated it once for all.

A Church that would keep the unity of the Spirit, again, must not consider itself to be so infallible, that not to belong to its membership is sin. What right has any one Church to set itself up as the standard, so that those who join it not are necessarily Dissenters? It is true my Episcopal brother is a Dissenter, he dissents from me; it is true he is a Nonconformist, for he does not conform to me: I would not, however, call him by such names, lest I should arrogate to my own Church to be the one Church, and so should break the unity of the Spirit. If I turn to history, I may believe that my Church can claim a long line of ancestors descending from the apostles, without ever running through the Church of Rome, but shall I therefore call a brother who does not quite see this succession, a schismatic, and denominate his assembly a conventicle? If he is a schismatic because he does not come to my place, why am I not a schismatic because I do not go to his? Well, but, he divides the Church! He ought to come and worship with me. Ought I not to go and worship with him? Ah! but we are the

larger number! Are divine things to be ruled by the majority? Where would
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the Church of God be any day if it came to polling? I am afraid the devil would always be at the head of the poll. We wish to keep the unity of the Spirit, and if we have a little sister, we will treat her all the more kindly, owing to the fewness of her members. If I want to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” I must never call in the magistrate to force my brother to pay for washing my surplice, ringing my bell, and winding up my clock. I must not tell my brother that he is bound to pay for the support of my worship. “Oh!” he says, “my dear friend, I pay for the maintenance of the worship which I believe to be correct, and I am quite willing that you should do the same for yours; I would voluntarily assist you if you were poor; but you tell me you will put me in prison if I do not pay, and yet tell me to keep the unity of the Spirit; but, my dear friend, it is not keeping the unity of the Spirit to take away my stool, and my table and my candlestick, and say you will put me in ‘limbo,’ or hail me before an ecclesiastical court. You send the constable after me; and then if I say a word about it, you say, ‘Charity hopeth all things.’” Yes, among the rest, it hopes that you will give up your sin in this matter.

If we should stand possessed of a piece of ground where we bury our dead, and if there should happen to come a member of another Christian Church who would wish to lay his poor dead baby in our ground, there being no other convenient spot anywhere, and he asks the favor, I think we can hardly be thought to keep the unity of the Spirit if we tell him, “No, nothing of the kind; you had your child sprinkled, therefore it cannot be buried with us Christians; we will not have your sprinkled baby lying alongside of our baptized dead.” I do not think that is keeping the unity of the Spirit. And I do not think when some Churches have turned from their grave-yard gate the mourners who have brought an unbaptized infant, and when the mourners have gone back weeping to their homes — I do not think such Churches have been endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Again, if Churches are to agree one with another, they must not make rules that ministers who are not of their own denomination shall not occupy their pulpits. I should be ashamed of you, if you passed a resolution that no one dissenting from us should stand in my pulpit. But we know a Church which says, “No matter how good a man may be; he may be a man as venerated as John Angell James; or he may have all the excellencies of a William Jay — we would not, perhaps, mind hearing him in a Town Hall, but into the sacredness of our particular rostrum these interlopers must not intrude; for, says this Church, “Ours are
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ministers, yours are only lay-teachers; ours are sacraments: the cup of blessing which we bless is the blood of Christ, and the bread which we break is the body of Christ; you have no sacramental efficacy with you; you are not a Church in fact, but only a body of schismatics, meeting together to carry out what you think to be right. We tolerate you; that is all we can do.” Where is the unity of the Spirit there? My dear friends, I received this

text from one of the most holy men in the Church of England: if I expound it slightly for her benefit, he will, I trust, excuse me, for I do so in all honesty, desiring to aid him and many others in revision and reform. If this Church were in the same condition as the Church of England, I would pray to be as plain in my remarks. I say it is an anachronism; it is a thing out of date for the nineteenth century, for any one Church in this land, and that Church the only one which defiles her hand by taking State-pay, to stand up and say, "We are the Church; our ministers are the ministers; our people are the people; and now, dear brethren, shake hands, and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit of God." Why, it is preposterous. Let us meet on equal ground; let us lay aside all pretences to superiority; let us really aid and not oppress each other; let us mingle in prayer; let us unite in confession of sin; let us join heartily in reforming our errors, and a true Evangelical Alliance will cover our land. If any Church will take the Bible as its standard, and in the power of the Spirit of God preach the name of Jesus, there are thousands of us who will rejoice to give the right hand of fellowship with a hearty greeting to all such, and we are every day striving to get other Churches and ourselves more and more into that condition in which, while holding our own, we can yet keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now, a few words to you in regard to your relationship to one another as members of the same Church. If we are to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in the same Church, then we must avoid everything that would mar it. Gossip — gossip is a very ready means of separating friends from one another. Let us endeavor to talk of something better than each other's characters. Dionysius went down to the Academy to Plato. Plato asked what he came for. "Why," said Dionysius, "I thought that you, Plato, would be talking against me to your students." Plato made this answer: "Dost thou think, Dionysius, we are so destitute of matter to converse upon that we talk of thee?" Truly we must be very short of subjects when we begin to talk of one another. It is better far that we magnify Christ than detract from the honor of his members. We must lay

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aside all envy. Multitudes of good people liked the Reformation, but they said they did not like the idea of its being done by a poor miserable monk, like Martin Luther; and so there are many who like to see good things done, and good works carried on, but do not care to see it done by that upstart young brother, or that poor man, or that woman who has no particular rank or state. As a Church let us shake off envyings; let us all rejoice in God's light; and as for pride — if any of you have grown vainglorious of late, shake it off. I hope to exercise a ministry in this place which will drive out those of you who will not acknowledge your brethren when they are poorer or of less education than yourselves. What if the man does mar the Queen's English when he talks — what does that matter, so long as his heart is right? As long as you can feel he loves the Master, surely you can put up with his faults of language, if he can put up with your faults of action. Then let us cultivate everything that would tend to

unity. Are any sick? Let us care for them. Are any suffering? Let us weep with them. Do we know one who has less love than others? then let us have more, so as to make up the deficiency. Do we perceive faults in a brother? let us admonish him in love and affection. I pray you be peacemakers, everyone. Let the Church go on as it has done for the last eleven years, in holy concord and blessed unity. Let us remember that we cannot keep the unity of the Spirit unless we all believe the truth of God. Let us search our Bibles, therefore, and conform our views and sentiments to the teaching of God's Word. I have already told you that unity in error is unity in ruin. We want unity in the truth of God through the Spirit of God. This let us seek after; let us live near to Christ, for this is the best way of promoting unity. Divisions in Churches never begin with those full of love to the Savior. Cold hearts, unholy lives, inconsistent actions, neglected closets; these are the seeds which sow schisms in the body; but he who lives near to Jesus, wears his likeness and copies his example, will be, wherever he goes, a sacred bond, a holy link to bind the Church more closely than ever together. May God give us this, and henceforth let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I commend the text to all believers, to be practiced through the coming year. And to those who are not believers, what can I say but that I trust their unity and their peace may be broken for ever, and that they may be led to Christ Jesus to find peace in his death? May faith be given, and then love and every grace will follow, so that they may be one with us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Finally, I want to say to you all, brethren, that, as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, if we are to forgive one another, there must be some other things which we ought to do. And the first is, do not let us provoke each other to offend. If I know that a man does not like a certain thing, I will not thrust it in his way. Do not say, "Well, but if he is short tempered, I cannot help it; he should not be so ready to take offense. I cannot be always paying deference to his absurd sensitiveness." No; but, brother, your friend is very ready to take offense, and you know that he is; have respect, then, to his infirmity of temper, such as you would have if he were afflicted in body. If you have rheumatism or gout, your friends do not go stamping across the room and saying, "He ought not to mind that; he ought not to feel it." Kind-hearted people step across the floor with a light step, for fear they should hurt the poor suffering limb. If a man has a diseased mind and is very irritable, treat him gently, pity his infirmity, and do not irritate him. A friend wrote me a short while ago a letter of serious complaint against a brother who had been very angry with him, and had spoken very sharply while excited to passion. I felt bound to hear the other side of the story, and I was obliged to say, "Now, you two brothers are both wrong. You, my brother, lost your temper; but you, my other brother, irritated him, so that I do not wonder he did lose his temper. And when

you saw he had lost his temper why did you not go away, or do something to quiet him? No, but you remained to increase the wrath, and then wrote to expose him." I blame the wood for burning, but what shall I say of the bellows? It was wrong to blaze, but was it right to fan the flame? Very often when a man is angry he may not be the only one to blame. Therefore, brothers and sisters, if we are to forgive each other, do not let us provoke each other to offend.

In the next place, do not make offenses. Oftentimes a man has been offended at another for no reason at all. One person has said of another as he passed him in the street, "He will not even nod to me. He is too proud to own me, because I am a poor man." Now, that beloved friend who was thus blamed could not see much further than his hand, for he was shortsighted. Another has been censured for not hearing, though he was deaf, and another for not shaking hands when his arm was crippled. Do not imagine offenses where they are not intended.

Next, do not take offenses where they are intended. It is a splendid thing if you will not be offended. Nothing makes a man feel so small as when you accept what he intended for an insult as if it were a compliment, and thank him for it. Can you master yourself to that point? Remember, when you have conquered yourself you have conquered the world. You have overcome everybody when you have so fully overcome your own spirit that you remain content with that which naturally would excite your wrath.

Then, if you must be offended, dear brother, do not exaggerate an offense. Some good women, I was about to say, and men also, when they come as tale-bearers with a charge, make a great many flourishes and additions. They go a long way round, and they bring innumerable beliefs, and suggestions, and hints, and hearsays into the business, until a midge's egg becomes as huge as ever was laid by an ostrich. I begin coolly to strip off the feathers and the paint, and I say, "Now, I do not see what that point had to do with it, or what that remark has in it all I can see when I come to look at the bare fact is so-and-so, and that was not much, was it?" "Oh, but there was more intended." Do not believe that, dear brother, dear sister. If there must be something wrong, let it be as little as you can. If you have a telescope, look through the large hole and minify instead of magnifying, or, better still, do not look at it at all. A blind eye is often the best eye a man can have, and a deaf ear is better by far than one which hears too much. "Also take no heed," says Solomon, "unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." Something you have done may irritate a servant, and he may make remarks which are unbecoming and impertinent. Don't hear what he is muttering. Keep out of hearing. He will be sorry tomorrow, and if he thinks you did not hear him he will continue in your service and be faithful to you. What would you do if your master picked you up for every word, and if he caught up every sentence that you

uttered? How would you live at all if he reckoned sharply with you? No, dear friends, as you have to forgive one another, do not take offense, and when offense is given do not exaggerate it, and, if you can, do not even observe it.

Then, again, do not publish offenses. There has been something very offensive said. What then? Do not repeat it. Do not go first to one, and then to another, and say, "Now this is quite private, and mind you keep it a secret; So-and-so has spoken shamefully." Better that you should let your heart break than go up and down with a firebrand in this fashion. If a brother has done wrong why should you do wrong? You will be doing wrong if you publish his fault. Remember how the curse came upon Noah's son for exposing his father; and how much better it is for us all when there is anything wrong to go backward and cover it, without even looking at it ourselves, if we can help it. Cover it up: cover it up. Charity covereth a multitude of sins. Not only one, two, three sins will charity cover, but she carries a cloak which covereth a whole host of faults.

Above all, my brethren, and with this I close, never in any way, directly or indirectly, avenge yourselves. For any fault that is ever done to you, the Master says unto you, -resist not evil. In all things bend, bow, yield, submit. "If you tread on a worm it will turn," says somebody. And is a worm your example? Christ shall be mine. It is a shocking thing when a Christian man forgets his Lord to find an excuse for himself among the poor creatures under his feet. But if it must be so, what does a worm do when it turns? When you have trodden on a worm, does it bite? Does the worm hurt any one? Ah, no. It has turned, but it has turned in its agony and writhed before you, that is all. You may do that, if you must. Brother, the most splendid vengeance you can ever have is to do good to them that do you evil, and to speak well of them that speak ill of you. They will be ashamed to look at you; they will never hurt you again if they see that you cannot be provoked except it be to greater love and larger kindness. This ought to be the mark of Christians; not "I will have the law of you," or "I will avenge myself," but "I will bear and forbear even to the end." "Vengeance is mine. I will repay it, saith the Lord." Do not take that into your hand which God says belongs to him, but as he for Christ's sake has forgiven you, so also forgive all those who do you wrong. "How long am I to do that?" says one. "I would not mind doing it three or four times." There was one of old who would go the length of six or seven, but Jesus Christ said "unto seventy times seven." That is a very considerable number. You may count whether you have yet reached that amount, and if you have you will now be glad to begin again, still forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. God help us to be patient to the end. Though I have not just now been preaching Christ Jesus as the object of the sinner's trust, yet remember that he must also be the object of our imitation. This is the kind of doctrine which Christ himself preached, and therefore, since he preached continually

this love to our neighbor, and forgiveness of our enemies, we ought both to preach and to practice it. Go ye and believe in him, and be imitators of him, remembering that he forgave his murderers upon the cross whereon he wrought out our redemption. May his Spirit rest upon you evermore. Amen.