

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4.1-3 ASV)

After unveiling some of the greatest truths in all Scripture in his Ephesians epistle, Paul exhorted the saints to walk in a manner that was worthy or deserving of the on-high, celestial calling with which the believers from among the nations were called. The same exhortation applies to us who believe in this day as well. We have been called to be seated among the celestials in Christ in the oncoming eons. We are not to take this calling lightly nor are we to be arrogant about this calling. We are to be humble and meek and patient with one another in our walk as we wait for our Lord to appear from heaven. None of us have all the answers or all the understanding of the ways of God and all of the truth of Scripture. However, this should not be used as an excuse not to seek for the truth.

The body of Christ is to be built up in love, and this requires that we not only walk in a humble, meek, and patient manner but that we show tolerance for one another in love. However, have we taken Paul's exhortation to heart, or are we ignoring it and instead dividing ourselves from one another as if we are better than some of our brethren in Christ? Do we treat one another in all humility, recognizing that we are all saved by grace through faith and none of us have any boast in our selves? Let your boast be in the Lord!

Paul declared that there is only one body and one spirit. However, throughout Christendom, do we see this reality, or do we see many divided over many things and each maintaining a distance from others? Many groups of believers hold to one set of doctrines that divides them from other groups of believers. Paul declared that there is only one Lord and one faith. Others declare that there are many baptisms, such as baptism of the spirit, baptism by water, and baptism by sprinkling; but Paul declared that there is only one baptism.

If the body of Christ took Paul's exhortation to heart, there would be no division of the body of Christ. Unfortunately, it is not so, for we have parted Christ, something that Paul saw happening among the immature believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1.13). Apart from a major move of God in which His spirit sweeps through the ecclesia of our day and changes hearts, I do not see this parting dramatically changing in our day. God Himself will have to move on the hearts of His people, particularly those who teach and lead, to bring a monumental shift away from sectarianism and back to the one foundation that is Christ and the oneness we have in Him.

Too many groups have centered their entire existence and purpose on a common theme or doctrine or emphasis that identifies them and makes them different from other groups. All too often these things become a source of pride. To shed such things becomes too costly and even threatens their very purpose for being. In themselves, these things might be acceptable; but too often, they are used as the very ground for division and keeping one group separated from another group. I heard one pastor-teacher bragging that he taught and held to the "old-time religion," as if it were a source of pride. It was often said by his congregation that there was no greater "church" than theirs. There

seemed to be no room for the possibility that they did not have the lock on greatness. There was little humility. Yet, they spoke of loving Jesus and His return.

If we see something of the oneness expressed by Paul and we see the celestial calling in Christ and we desire to take heed of Paul's exhortation, what are we to do? Paul has given us the answer, and that is to be **giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

There is only one spirit, and it is the spirit of God that unites us all into one body. There are not many spirits. Our unity is not in us coming up with a common creed, a mission statement, a statement of our faith, a statement of our emphasis, a list of the truths or doctrines we hold to, or many other expressions of our organization or institution. Whenever we decide to unite a group of believers in such a fashion we are potentially going onto ground that divides. If we allow this to mar the unity of the spirit, then we have parted Christ. It is pride that parts us and keeps us parted, for pride says that we are better than others and have no need for any not in our camp.

We do not have to work up unity or come to any agreement about unity among one another; rather, we must be diligent to preserve or keep the unity that is already ours *in* Christ. This unity is a fact, not a wish. We are not called to create the unity; we are called to keep or preserve what has been given to us *in* spirit. It is a spiritual unity. When we have a heart to diligently keep the unity of the spirit, whenever we meet another believer, especially for the first time, we seek to touch the life of Christ in the other. We don't seek to know their specific creed or emphasis. If in our conversation we learn that we have differences in these areas, we don't condemn but we listen and seek for our common ground in Christ. Our unity is in Christ alone!

How do we preserve this unity? In the bond of peace! We are bonded together in Christ as one spiritual body, a new creation, and have been given the word of the conciliation, which speaks of the peace that has been brought to us through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1.20).

So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new! Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them, and placing in us the word of the conciliation. For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, "Be conciliated to God!" (2 Corinthians 5.17-20 CV)

We have been reconciled to God; that is, we have been brought into a harmonious relationship of peace with our God, no longer enemies, and as such, we must be at peace with one another, as brethren, not enemies. If we have been at war with one another over our doctrines and other things, we need to reconcile ourselves to our brethren.

Christ is our bond of peace. Our unity is dependent on this bond of peace, along with our loving one another in tolerance, being patient with one another in all humility. As Paul wrote: **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men** (Romans 12.18 NASB), **love without hypocrisy** (Romans 12.9 NASB), **owe nothing to anyone except to love one another** (Romans 13.8 NASB), and **be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you** (Ephesians 4.32 NSAB). If there is to be true change in this regard, it must begin with each individual believer. Peace starts with each one who has light in this matter, not with others.

Let us not follow in the footsteps of those who have parted Christ. Let us be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit that we have in Christ. Today, much stands against this unity, but if we have the word of the conciliation in our hearts, we will do all to preserve or maintain the unity of the spirit that is ours in Christ. Let us start today **forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**