

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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ALL ATTAIN UNTO THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye no longer walk as the Gentiles also walk, in the vanity of their mind, being darkened in their understanding.... (Ephesians 4.11-18a ASV)

Paul exhorted the saints to be diligent to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. God is spirit and He has no division. As such, those who are in Christ, having received an earnest of the spirit of God, do not have to attain to unity; they merely have to be diligent to keep it in the bond of peace. We could say that the unity of the spirit is the basis for our fellowship and body-life with one another. When we join hearts in spirit, we enter into the sacred realm of our God in which there is no division; just peace, love, joy, and righteousness, to name a few.

However, let us face the fact that often the Lord's people are not very diligent to keep the unity of the spirit as we divide ourselves over many things. Even those who earnestly seek for the truth of God in His word have many honest disagreements about how to interpret Scripture. Unfortunately, many of these differences are used as battering rams against one another, which often results in division and war, not peace. Some get so worked up over interpretation of Scripture that if someone comes along who does not share their same view, then that person is branded as a heretic and is "going to hell." This is a common occurrence for those who hold to universal reconciliation or the restoration of all things, including all mankind. Those who hold to the heaven-hell view in which billions of people will end up being tortured for ever and ever are the most likely ones to tell those who believe in the restoration of all things that they are "going to hell" for believing such a thing. Of course, this is only one example out of many. It is not my purpose to focus on the myriad of differences and the battles that ensue over them, but to speak to Paul's answer.

Obviously, Paul recognized that there would be differences or different levels of faith among believers. Everyone would not grow in Christ at the same pace or in the same depth of understanding. In fact, some would not come into the proper understanding of the teaching of Paul. Consider what Peter said about Paul's epistles.

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; wherein are some things hard to be understood, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from

your own steadfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3.15-18 ASV)

By Peter's own admission, some of what Paul wrote was hard to understand. If it was difficult in that day when the apostles were still walking this earth and could explain their writing, then where does this leave us 2,000 years later? Surely, Peter knew that there were challenges in their understanding of the word of God, and this is why he wrote: **Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things** [holy living, godliness in light of the new heaven and earth], **give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight** (2 Peter 3.14 ASV [added by writer]). Again, we find the word diligence linked with peace.

Paul's desire was for the perfecting of the saints. As he saw it, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers are given to the ecclesia for the perfecting of the saints, unto the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith. You see, we are to keep the unity of the spirit as we grow to attain to the unity of the faith. In other words, the body of Christ or, if you will, the body of believers that has been given the faith of Jesus is to grow in this faith until we all attain to a unity of faith or oneness in our understanding. We have not arrived yet, and we will not arrive until we, as the corporate body, are fully grown up in Christ, a full-grown man, full of Christ. Please understand that this growth is more than having a full knowledge of Christ and the things of God; it is to have the fullness of Christ Himself; it is to be full of Christ. This is what the building up of the body of Christ is all about.

We have it all backwards. We strive to have greater knowledge of the word of God, what we call the truth, and yet we fail to see that Christ Himself is the Truth. After all, He said: **I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life!** All truth is discovered in the very life and character of our Lord Jesus. Truth is not some abstract that sits outside of Him; it is all contained in Him. This is why we must grow up in all things into Him, who is the Head, even Christ. Our spiritual growth is into Christ; it is a growth that leads us to become like Him in character. When we have all attained to the fullness of Christ then it can be said that we have attained to the unity of the faith. **The unity of the faith is not about believing who Jesus is but about becoming who He is in character and in glory.** There is a vast difference between the two levels of faith. One starts us on the path, but the other leads us to the finish line, to the victory in Christ when we are fully conformed to His image as His one body with Him as the one Head.

How is the body to build up itself? There is only one way, and that way is love. The body is to build up itself in love. The perfecting of the saints is the perfecting of love among the saints. The work of ministering is the work of love ministered throughout the body. The service of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers is the service of love that is to encourage and exhort the body of Christ to grow up in love. There is no other way.

However, there is a danger that we face, and that danger comes from false prophets and teachers who come in the name of the Lord but whose aim is to introduce many winds of doctrines that will lead the many astray. How are we to combat false teaching and prophecy? Again, love is the answer. Speak the truth in love! Don't condemn brothers and sisters if they see things differently. Seek the unity of the spirit first. If they are in the spirit and walking in the light, then there is ground for fellowship, and love will bind you together. Then, on this ground, you can seek the truth together and trust the spirit of God to lead you. If there is true humility, then the ones who seem to be off in some manner will yield to correction. If they are wolves in sheep's clothing, this too will become apparent as you see that they are walking as the nations who walk in darkness.

Dear beloved ones, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, show tolerance for one another in love; keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace until we all attain to the unity of the faith. It won't be long until our Lord comes and sets us all straight as we come into the fullness of His life.