

The Unity of the Spirit

Neil Girrard

Having been challenged to share my own experiences of “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3), I find myself in a dilemma similar to Jude: “Beloved, while I very much desired to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3) Looking back on my experience throughout my 25 or so years of seeking and following Christ, I must confess that my experience of “the unity of the Spirit” is exceedingly rare. That is, the moments of being in “one accord” within various group settings were quickly overshadowed by various philosophies, agendas and even “theologies” that, in short order, literally tore each various group apart.

First, in the context of modern churchianity, “the unity of the Spirit” unfortunately must be most often defined by what it is not.

- The unity of the Spirit cannot be maintained where “Pastor” Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) rules his pulpit and congregation with an iron fist or where “Apostle” Hymenaeus (1 Tim. 1:20) is the only man whom “God” gives spiritual “wisdom, insight and revelation.”
- “If you don’t like what we do and say here, you can just go somewhere where you do.” This is known in the New Testament as the sin of “divisions, seditions or dissensions” (Greek, *dichostasia* [1370], literally, “twice standing” or “double standard” – Gal. 5:20) and it is another preclusion to the unity of the Spirit.
- In such an atmosphere, what is right in one’s own eyes (lawlessness, Greek, *anomia* [459]) is what determines what agenda, philosophy and even “theology” will be acceptable, preached and practiced.
- Men most often call this context “church” but the New Testament calls it “heresy” (Greek, *hairesis* [139] – Gal. 5:20), the formation of a subgroup around a particular man, idea, doctrine, “theology,” etc.

Now, it is not to be supposed that the unity of the Spirit, virtually impossible in the “church” context, is any more easily experienced in the out-of-“church” context. Diotrephes and Hymenaeus are equally content to take center stage in a home “church” as they are to stand in the pulpit of a mega-“church.” Sectarianism is just as prevalent and lawlessness is just as rampant (perhaps even more so). If we could even just begin to use the English word “church” when we’re referring to any manmade additions to what Jesus is building (Mt. 16:18) and use the Greek word *ekklesia* (Christ’s *people* called out of this world’s darkness to attend to His kingdom of light, [1577]) to refer to God’s original intent and design, we could at least begin to have spiritually mature discussions about which is which – provided, of course, that we don’t fall into the deception that simply *calling* ourselves *ekklesia* is the same thing as *being* true *ekklesia*!

Second, we must recognize that it is the unity of *God's Spirit*. This is why unity based on Pastor "Diotrephes or "Apostle" Hymenaeus or based on sectarian heresies (denominations, including the supposedly non-denominational ones and the house "church" denomination) that serve most as a cloak for lawlessness will not bring us into the unity of God's Spirit – each of these counterfeits rely on some other spirit. And we must recognize too that "the unity of the Spirit" is not "the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13) – that is, unity based on doctrines, neither of men and especially not that of demons! (1 Tim. 4:1) Doctrines (teachings) are only valuable if they are truth, that is, the rightly divided, whole counsel of God – to the extent that any teaching falls short of this standard, it will be a vehicle for distortion, deception or division. Doctrines that can be grasped and wielded by the soul simply replace our reliance upon the Person of Christ Jesus – for example, we no longer need Him to preserve us when we have a doctrine that tells us we cannot possibly ever lose our salvation. (Yes, it can get that subtle!) When we come together *only* on the basis of what God's Spirit has done in and to us and of what He (the Spirit of truth – Jn. 16:13, etc.) alone has taught us as individuals, *preserving* the unity of God's Spirit then begins to become a possibility.

Third, the word "unity" is truly better rendered as "unanimity." (Greek, *henotes* [1775]) It is the unforced, unanimous agreement that the Spirit of God has said, "This *is* that" or "This *is* the way in which this group should go." (Acts 15:22, etc. – consider especially how James, the leader of the circumcision group, had to set aside his own pro-Jewish bigotry and pro-law bias to agree!) Because so many groups are formed on the basis of what the particular group desires (again this is little more than "theological" lawlessness), there really is no will of the Lord (for that group) to find other than to love one another until the call is heard to "Come out" of the "Christian" idolatry or the Babylonian abominations, endure the wilderness and learn to truly follow the Lamb wherever He leads. (2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:10-11, Rev. 18:4, 14:4) Any group ("church" fellowship, house "church," whatever) that is formed only of likeminded "believers" who regularly commute across town to gather or any group that shares no life outside of the meetings really needs to seek the Lord as to whether or not He has any definable purpose for that group. When we, as a group, refuse to move or act until we have a *unanimous* agreement as to the will of God for all questions that involves this group, we are very close to presenting the Person of Christ (who is a *composite* and not an individual's picture) from within our group. (1 Cor. 14:26, 1 Pet. 4:10-11)

These are the elements of the faith that need contended for, though in truth, I would have preferred to speak only of the brothers I do share something of the unity of the Spirit with – neither of whom do I often get to enjoy face to face fellowship with. These brothers, like myself, have not attained to spiritual perfection and we never will in this lifetime. But because we desire God's will above our own agendas (at least where we recognize our own agendas and issues!) we are able to discern when "Pastor" Diotrephes is lording over us, when "Apostle" Hymenaeus is speaking lies and distortions, or when "Christian" rules and bylaws are supplanting the rule of the Holy Spirit in our lives – just as Jesus promised. (Jn . 7:17) Because we want Christ to be our true and only King, we seek to obey Him whether or not that brings us into conflict with men (bearing His name or not) – and by this we know we are being saved. (Heb. 5:9, Acts 5:29) Because we obey Him as individuals, when we do come together, it is not at all difficult to simultaneously seek after God's purpose for bringing us together while we "*preserve* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3) But when I encounter other (self-proclaimed) "brothers" who have a different mindset, even after being together for hours, I can discern no

real reason for our being together at all and I often leave wondering just what spirit these “brothers” operate under!

There is more than a little truth in the observation that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God (that realm where Christ and God are actually *obeyed* - Mt. 6:10 – and the opposite of lawlessness because there is a King to be followed and obeyed – Jdgs. 21:25) but the “church” is what came into existence. Jesus said, “Every [Bible scholar] instructed [by the Spirit of truth] concerning the kingdom of God [that realm where Christ is truly King] is like a householder able to bring out of his treasure things new and old.” (Mt. 13:52) Only when we cease to be carnal and lawless “theologians” (virtual religious and spiritual “experts” who, according to our own desires and preferences, have all “the right answers”) formulating our preferred doctrines from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (the wrong tree), only then will we be able to draw genuine truth, righteousness, light and life from the tree of life (the right tree), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Only when He is our King, indeed our all – first individually and then corporately – can we ever hope to experience what Paul called “the unanimity of the Spirit of God.” May God be merciful and gracious and grant us such experience soon!

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org
Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org
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