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Spurgeon on Unity

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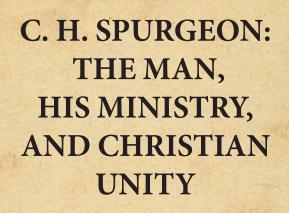
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An Overview

A young preacher from a small village emerges from obscurity and takes the world by storm. He has no formal training, but intellectuals eagerly attend his teaching. His brilliance is no barrier for the commoners who crowd to hear him speak. His earnest, eloquent words are copied, translated, and circulated worldwide. Prayer and unwavering commitment to God's Word are hallmarks of his ministry. He gives away the wealth that comes his way, for he values souls, not possessions. Preaching is always his priority, but he also sacrificially serves those in need. His fame is global, yet he remains humble. He is mocked and persecuted, yet he endures undaunted. He suffers greatly, yet he serves tirelessly. Countless lives are changed by his life, and his legacy endures to this day. This is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also of His faithful disciple and servant, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Childhood

Charles was the first of seventeen children born to John and Eliza Spurgeon. He was born June 19, 1834, in Kelvedon, Essex, a small town located fifty-five miles northeast of London. From ages fourteen months to six years, Charles lived with his paternal grandparents in the small farming community of Stambourne where his grandfather James pastored the local Congregational church. By age five, Charles was eagerly exploring his grandfather's extensive library of Puritan writings, and though he attended school, his primary education came from reading the Puritans. At nine years of age he was already absorbing the writings of giants such as John Owen, Matthew Henry, and Richard Baxter.

His brother James, who later served as his associate pastor, recalled.

Charles never did anything else but study. I kept rabbits, chickens, and pigs and a horse; he kept to books. While I was busy here and there, meddling with anything and everything that a boy could touch, he kept to books and could not be kept away from study. But though he had nothing to do with other things, he could have told you about them, because he used to read about everything, with a memory as gripping as a vise and as full as a barn.1

Charles' passion for reading endured throughout his life. As an adult he typically read and annotated six books per week, and his personal library contained more than twelve thousand volumes. His remarkable memory allowed him to recall quotes from books he had read years before.

Conversion

As a young teen Spurgeon was greatly burdened by his sin.

When I was but young in years, I felt with much sorrow the evil of sin. . . . I hungered for deliverance, for my soul fainted within me. I feared that the very skies would fall on me and crush my guilty soul. God's law had laid hold of me and was showing me my sins. If I slept at night I dreamed of the bottomless pit, and when I awoke I seemed to feel the misery I had dreamed. Up to God's house I went, but my song was but a sigh. To my chamber I retired, and there with tears and groans I offered up my prayer without a hope and without a refuge.2

Charles realized, though, "that misery was sent for this reason, that I might then be made to cry to Jesus." So he determined to visit every church in town to learn how to save his soul.

So it was on a snowy January 6th in 1850 that fifteen-year-old Charles entered a Primitive Methodist chapel. A dozen or so faithful saints awaited their preacher, and when he failed to arrive a layman stepped into the pulpit and read Isaiah 45:22, "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." After explaining the verse in a simple, straightforward manner, the lay preacher looked at Spurgeon and said, "Young man, you look very miserable, and you always will be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then he lifted up his hands and shouted, "Young man, look to Jesus Christ! Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but look and live." Charles Spurgeon did so and then dedicated his life to urging other sinners to look to Jesus and live.

Early Ministry

In April, Spurgeon joined the Congregational church but soon became convinced that infant baptism was unbiblical. When he informed his parents of his baptism his surprised mother said, "Ah, Charles! I often prayed to the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you might become a Baptist." To which he replied, "Ah, Mother! The Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty and given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought." Spurgeon later lost his opportunity for formal education when he was directed to the wrong room at Stepney College and missed his interview. He then moved to Cambridge, where he became an evangelist and lay preacher associated with St. Andrew's Street Baptist Church.

Waterbeach Chapel

In October of 1851 Charles became pastor of the Waterbeach Baptist Chapel near Cambridge, and the church quickly grew from 40 to 400 under his passionate preaching. Two years later Spurgeon attracted the attention of a historic London church that was looking for a pastor. An early biographer records, "One of the friends had become impressed with his talents while noting the way in which he had been somewhat roughly rebuked at a meeting at Cambridge on account of outspoken adherence to what he judged to be the truth."6 These two traits, Spurgeon's remarkable talents and his unyielding commitment to truth, characterized his ministry from first to last.

The New Park Street Chapel

The New Park Street Chapel had fewer than 100 attendees when Spurgeon arrived in April of 1854, but soon its 1,200 seats were filled and the church was remodeling to expand. During construction, crowds of 5,000 met for services at Exeter Hall, and more than 10,000 people would gather when Spurgeon spoke outdoors. On October 7, 1857, Spurgeon preached at the Crystal Palace on a day of national prayer before an audience of 23,654 people who came to hear him. When the Chapel reopened it was already too small. No building seemed large enough to accommodate the unprecedented numbers of people wanting to hear Charles Spurgeon preach God's Word, so the church built the largest Protestant church in the world. The 5,600 seat Metropolitan Tabernacle opened debt-free in March of 1861. Spurgeon was twenty-six.



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Delivered on Sunday morning January 1st, 1865

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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Ephesians 4:15-16

Delivered on the Lord's Day evening August 6th, 1882

by

C. H. SPURGEON

BACKGROUND

The Bible uses many images to describe the church—a bride, a flock, a family—but one of its most vivid is that of a body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:7-16). Christ the Head unites and directs the various members of His body, who each play a critical but distinct function. Only by being connected with the Head can the body stay alive, and only by cooperating harmoniously with the other members can the body stay healthy. Our own bodies remind us how critical and practical Christian unity in the body of Christ truly is.

Spurgeon acknowledges that he cannot fully present this tremendous subject in a single sermon. "If I had to preach fully and accurately on all that is taught in this text, I would certainly need to deliver a series of five or six sermons at least. There is such a wonderful depth of meaning in these inspired words that I might keep on explaining them and all the while be like someone who takes water out of the sea, always amazed that there is so much more left than he can possibly draw from it."

He begins to explore the riches of this passage by highlighting four key truths:

- Our unity with Christ the Head
- II. Our individuality within the body of Christ
- III. Our relationship with other Christians
- IV. Our intimate unity in the one church of Jesus Christ

"The head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

~ Ephesians 4:15-16

If I had to preach fully and accurately on all that is taught in this text, I would certainly need to deliver a series of five or six sermons at least. There is such a wonderful depth of meaning in these inspired words that I might keep on explaining them and all the while be like someone who takes water out of the sea, always amazed that there is so much more left than he can possibly draw from it. One writer says that the meaning of this passage is as closely knit together as the joints it speaks of. That remark is very true, for here we have so much thought placed in so little space that it is as though it has been compressed by hydraulic pressure.

Turning to the text, we find that the apostle was very anxious that the saints at Ephesus would be knit together like the different parts of one body. Unity is not an easy thing to attain. Have you found it so in your own family? In many large families, and even in small ones, there are sometimes most unfortunate disagreements, and it is a happy household indeed that is wholly joined together as one body.

Look at the world in general, at its various organizations, societies, and associations, and see what disunity and discord are displayed everywhere. Half the newspapers are filled with reports of the squabbles going on in Parliament. I suppose we would hardly be human if we always agreed on everything. Certainly, there is plenty of division among us. We seem to reflect the scattering of the nations at the Tower of Babel, for our tongues are still confused,

and so we misunderstand one another. What is more criminal, we often intentionally misrepresent one another. We are all too ready to forget our Lord's words, "For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (Matthew 18:7).

Paul was anxious to have the Ephesian church thoroughly knit together, and the fourth chapter, from which our text is taken, is all about unity and how to maintain it. With his hands bound in chains, the prisoner of the Lord pleads with them to be truly one—to walk worthy of the calling with which they were all called by the one Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:1). He pleads with them to bear with one another in love with all lowliness, gentleness, and longsuffering (v. 2). He most touchingly and tenderly appeals to his own imprisonment as an argument for them to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3). He seems to say, "As you remember my bonds, put yourselves in the blessed bonds of brotherly love."

Then he adds, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (vv. 4-5). Both in the inward creed and the outward confession of it, they were all one. They were not divided on these points. So Paul begged them not to be divided in anything, especially since he was able to assure them that they had "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," and also one Christ, the Savior of all (v. 6).

When Paul reminded the Ephesians that He who "ascended on high" is the same Jesus who "first descended into the lower parts of the earth" (vv. 8-9), I think he intended to remind them of the continuity of the work of Christ and that it was the same Christ who both descended to earth and ascended to Heaven. There was no change in the Worker, for the one work was accomplished by the one Person, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Why, then, should we split up and divide and hold a hundred opinions as though Christ were divided? Paul tells us that when Christ ascended on high, He gave all sorts of officers who were necessary for His church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, and so on—all for the purpose of "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of

the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (vv. 12-13).

It is this that the apostle aimed at, that the saints would be one in Christ Iesus. Then, remembering that one very frequent cause of division is the instability of many people's thinking, he urged them to "no longer be



Why, then, should we split up and divide and hold a hundred opinions as though Christ were divided?

children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (v. 14). He wanted them to know what they believed and not be driven away from it with every puff of wind. He did not want them to be duped and deceived by the schemes of men, by cunning manipulation, or by con artists who carry away the truth, as so many religious tricksters are continually doing today. They establish lies and overthrow the truth by their enchanting deception.

When Paul speaks of "the trickery of men" (v. 14), he seems to be alluding to the casting of dice. I am afraid that there are many people whose religion comes to them according to what they call "luck." They happened to be born on a certain street, and their parents attended a particular place of worship, so they believed what was taught there. If the dice had fallen some other way, though, they might have been Muslims, Mormons, Roman Catholics, or God knows what else, for they do not have any solid reasons for believing what they are supposed to believe. They hold their faith, as it were, by a kind of chance, and they are quite ready to let it go again if "chance" should so arrange it.

The apostle implores us to guard against this evil and to hold fast the faith, to be established in it. He wants us to know why we believe it so that we, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things" (v. 15) into Christ. Christ is the one and only Head of the church and the one to whom every living member is vitally joined. Every person who is saved is a part of Christ's spiritual body. As such he is to develop in harmony with the growth of the entire body until he and every other person joined with him in the living structure will attain to the stature of a perfect man (v. 13). The whole church with its Head, Christ Jesus, becomes God's spiritual, "perfect man" to be glorified forever and ever.

You see, dear friends, that even when I am only trying to introduce this great subject to you, I am overwhelmed with the vastness of it. There is a whole mint of meaning in this passage. The apostle brings us here to tons of precious metals in the heavenly treasury. It is impossible for me to set forth all the spiritual wealth that is revealed here, but I will strive to point out four things in the text: first, our union with Christ the Head; second, our individuality; third, our relationship to each other; and, last, our intimate unity in the one church of Jesus Christ.



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John 13:34-35

Delivered on the Lord's Day evening April 4th, 1875

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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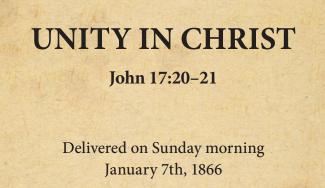
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Titus 1:4

Delivered on the Lord's Day evening November 6th, 1887

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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C. H. SPURGEON

by

BACKGROUND

In 1866 Spurgeon preached his New Year's message on the topic of Christian unity for the second year in a row. His sermon text had come, as it had the year before, from a Church of England clergyman ministering in the suburbs of London. Spurgeon's friend and biographer G. Holden Pike recalled, "The discourse was able and helpful and struck an excellent note at the threshold of a year that had been anticipated by self-proclaimed prophets as certain to be a year of supernatural wonders. There were those ... who professed to expect that the Lord Himself would come in 1866."26

This sermon was preceded by a major unity initiative by Spurgeon. On November 10, 1865, the Metropolitan Tabernacle hosted a special meeting for "promoting the union of Baptist ministers and churches" by forming the London Association of Baptist Ministers Holding Evangelical Sentiments, and the Churches under Their Care.²⁷ Spurgeon concluded this meeting by asking for "a manifestation that we intend unity." He asked first the ministers, then elders and deacons, and then church members to offer an audible "Amen" to affirm their desire to unite and love one another.

"Unity in Christ" presents Jesus' classic prayer offered just before His betrayal and arrest in Gethsemane. On the eve of His execution, Christ's final prayer with His disciples was for their unity. Spurgeon explains:

- The unity that Jesus desired
- II. The work that is necessary
- III. The prayer that is offered
- IV. The result that is anticipated
- V. The question raised by the text

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." ~ John 17:20-21

For several years I have thankfully received my sermon text for the first Sabbath in the year from an honorable clergyman of a parish in the suburbs of our city. Spared by a gracious providence, my good brother has sent me, along with his Christian greetings, these two verses in John 17 for my subject this morning. I can only hope that as we have enjoyed together for several years a true communion of spirit in the things of God, we may continue to walk together in holy service, loving each other with a pure heart fervently, until one or the other of us will be taken

up to dwell above.

The most tender and touching prayer of the Master contained in this chapter opens up to us His inmost heart. Jesus was in Gethsemane, and His passion was just beginning. He stood like a victim at the altar where the wood was already arranged, and the fire was already kindled to consume the sacrifice. Lifting up His eyes to Heaven, with a Son's true love gazing on His Father's throne, Iesus rested in humble

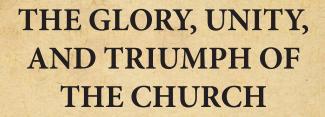
Because unity lay so very near the Savior's heart at such a time of overwhelming trial, it must have been priceless to Him.

confidence on Heaven's strength. He looked away for a moment from the strife and resistance that was going on around Him and asked for what His heart was most fully set on. He opened His mouth wide that God might fill it (Psalm 81:10).

This prayer, I take it, was not only the casual expression of the Savior's desire at the end but is also a sort of model of the prayer that is continually going up from Him to the eternal throne. There is a difference in the manner of its offering. With sighs and tears He offered up His humble petition on earth below, but now with authority He pleads enthroned in glory. But the plea is the same what He desired while still below is what His soul still longs for now that He is taken up and is glorified above.

It is significant, beloved, that the Savior in His last moments would not only desire the salvation of all His people but also plead for the unity of the saved ones—that being saved they might be united. It was not enough that each sheep should be taken from the jaws of the wolf—He would have all the sheep gathered into one fold under His own care. He was not satisfied that the members of His body should each one of them be saved as the result of His death—He must have those members fashioned into a glorious body.

Because unity lay so very near the Savior's heart at such a time of overwhelming trial, it must have been priceless to Him. It is of this unity that we will speak this morning, and we will speak of it in this manner. First of all, we will have a little to say about the unity desired. Then second, we will touch on the work that is necessary, namely, that the chosen be gathered in. Third, we will comment on the prayer offered. Fourth, we will speak about the result anticipated. And fifth, we will discuss a question raised by the text.



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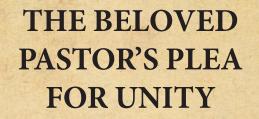
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John 17:22-23

Delivered on the Lord's Day morning May 4th, 1879

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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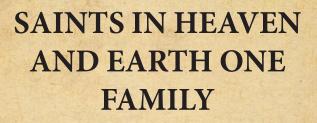
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Romans 1:7

Delivered on the Lord's Day evening July 7th, 1889

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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Ephesians 3:15

Delivered on the Lord's Day morning August 8th, 1875

by

C. H. SPURGEON



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John 7:43

Delivered on the Lord's Day evening March 21st, 1880

by

C. H. SPURGEON

BACKGROUND

God is the great divider as well as the great uniter. He divided light from darkness, seas from skies, and earth from ocean. He separated Noah from the nations, Abram from the Chaldeans, Isaac from Ishmael, and Israel from Egypt and Canaan. God divides the angels from the demons, the righteous from the wicked, and the children of the covenant from the world. And after He divides, God unites those He calls to Himself.

Jesus does the same. He separates wheat from chaff, grain from tares, and sheep from goats. As Christ Himself said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" (Matthew 10:34–35).

After Jesus divides, He also unites. He unites His sheep into one flock, His disciples into one church, and His redeemed into one body. Ultimately, Christ perfectly unites those who receive Him in Heaven and completely separates those who reject Him into Hell. Christ unites and divides eternally.

It should come as no surprise that the apostle John records that "there was a division among the people because of Him" (John 7:43). Spurgeon urges us to unite ourselves with Christ and His people before we are divided from Him and them forever. As he explains in this sermon, Christ has always been and will always be a divisive figure.

- I. Christ divides unbelievers from each other
- II. Christ divides unbelievers from believers
- III. Faith in Christ produces unity, both now and forever

"So there was a division among the people because of Him." ~ John 7:43

It seems that even when Christ was the preacher, there was a division among the hearers. So we should not be surprised if the same result follows from our preaching. Undoubtedly, strife has sometimes been caused by a preacher's harsh words or foolish speech. He may have spoken rashly or offensively. But even if he did not, not everyone would have been pleased, for even when Jesus spoke—spoke as no one had ever spoken—not all His hearers were pleased. We truly say, "Many men, many minds," and therefore even when Christ spoke "there was a division among the people because of Him."

Nor was the division to be traced to the subject that Jesus was speaking about at the time. There are some deep, mysterious subjects that seem intended to stir up controversy. Even Solomon the wise would create division if he were to speak on them. But in this case the subject was Christ Himself, with Christ as the speaker! It was concerning Him that the division occurred. There was a division among the people,



If there is any point on which all mankind should have been agreed, it is concerning Him who came to save men.

not concerning predestination or free will, not concerning forms of church government, not concerning the right way to observe the sacraments, but "because of Him."