

Sermon to the saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, January 17, 2016

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. - Joh 13:34

Nothing is pressed upon the Christian soul more earnestly in the scriptures than the exhortation to mutual love, unity, and concord. It is the law of Christ's kingdom - the chief lesson of his school. Consider a small sampling:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, - 1Co 13:1-4

If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. - Phil. 2:1-4

We are exhorted by the Word of God to be of one accord. A pastoral career could be spent on this subject alone. I submit to you, beloved, that true fellow believers on the Lord Jesus Christ being of one accord means so much more than being in agreement concerning an idea or a specific course of action. The English word 'accord' occurs in the authorized version of the Bible 16 times – 2 times in the OT, and 14 in the NT. Of those 14 instances found in the NT, 12 use the Greek word *homothumadon* – a unique Greek word that helps us understand the uniqueness of the Christian community we are exhorted to. *Homothumadon* is a compound of two words meaning to "rush along" and "in unison". The image is almost musical; a number of notes are sounded which, while different, harmonize in pitch and tone. As the instruments of a great concert under the direction of a concert master, so the Holy Spirit blends together the lives of members of Christ's church. Synonyms for this rendering of the word 'accord' are: concert, concurrence, congruence, harmony, sympathy; antonyms include: difference, discord, disunity, refusal, antagonism, dissension, opposition.

We are similarly exhorted to be of one mind – and these twin notions of being of one mind and one accord seem to go hand in hand. To be sure, this exhortation includes the implication of being unified in doctrine, though the same level of understanding may not exist in every member, or even a conscious awareness of some specific aspect of doctrine by a member at a given time. And as the Lord gives us more and more light, a new wrinkle that produces better understanding might be brought to the table, at the Lord's hand, by the mouth of one or more members - eventually permeating the understanding of others. We've seen that happen with our own eyes. This one mind certainly means much more than all thinking the same thing, as everyone thinking the same thing can certainly be a disastrous state of affairs, as is evidenced in scripture:

These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. – Rev. 17:13

I submit to you that the notion of being of one mind AND of one accord has as much to do with our real, explicitly-felt and expressed outlook toward one another, as members together in the body of Christ and as real brothers and sisters, as it does toward the veracity of an idea.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. – Rom. 12:16

Gill, in part, on this verse: Be of the same mind one towards another –

Which is not to be understood of the sameness of their judgment, or of their agreement in sentiments, espousing the same doctrines, observing the same ordinances, and in the same manner, and attending to the same form of discipline; but of their having the same love, and being of the same accord and affection to one another, entertaining the same good opinion, or a better, of others than of themselves; think of one another, as equally interested in the love of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ, blessed with the same spiritual blessings in him, and called in the same hope of your calling; and do not think of one another, as being one richer or wiser than another, do not value yourselves upon that.

Mind not high things;

be not high-minded, do not think too highly of yourselves, and therefore comparatively better than another man; meddle not with, nor grasp at things too high for you, that are out of your reach, and beyond your capacity; nor seek great things for yourselves, as riches, honours, &c. nor covet great company:

but condescend to men of low estate;

or "to low things"; be content with mean and low things in life, and disdain not to take notice of and converse with men in a low condition, whether in things temporal or spiritual; who may be poor in this world, be very ignorant and illiterate, as to general knowledge and learning; be men of mean parts and abilities, of very small gifts, and be weak in faith and experience; condescend to their weaknesses, bear their infirmities, and become all things to them for their good, and God's glory: consider the apostle is writing to citizens of Rome, who might be tempted to look upon themselves above others, and to look disdainfully upon others, as citizens too often do on country people, or highly educated upon others, or men with some professional distinction, or men of temporal means, as if they were below them, as persons of low life to them:

be not wise in your own conceits;

This is attended with bad consequences, spoils a man's usefulness, prevents his improvement in knowledge, tempts him to reject all counsel and advice given him, and to treat his fellow creatures and Christians with haughtiness and insolence, and exposes him to the scorn and contempt of men: or "be not wise by or with yourselves"; imagining you have all the wisdom, and others have none; or keeping it to yourselves - what wisdom you have communicate it to others.

Henry: A united love: "Be of the same mind one towards another" - that is, labor, as much as you can, to agree in apprehension; and, wherein you come short of this, yet agree in affection; endeavor to be all one, not affecting to clash, and contradict, and thwart one another; but keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Consider this same notion of exhortation elsewhere in scripture:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. - 1 Cor. 1:10

Henry: (Paul) extorts them to unity and brotherly love, and reproves them for their divisions. He had received an account from some that wished them well of some unhappy differences among them. It was neither ill-will to the church, nor to their ministers, that prompted them to give this account; but a kind and prudent concern to have these heats qualified by Paul's interposition, as if to say: Be perfectly joined together in the same mind, as far as you can. In the great things of religion be of a mind: but, when there is not a unity of sentiment, let there be a union of affections. The consideration of being agreed in greater things should extinguish all feuds and divisions about minor ones. (Further, Paul) hints at the origin of these contentions. Pride lay at the bottom, and this made them factious. Only of pride cometh contention, (Pr 13:10). They quarrelled about their ministers. Paul and Apollos were both faithful ministers of Jesus Christ, and helpers of their faith and joy: but those who were disposed to be contentious broke into parties, and set their ministers at the head of their several factions: some cried up Paul, perhaps as the most sublime and spiritual teacher; others cried up Apollos, perhaps as the most eloquent speaker; some Cephas, or Peter, perhaps for the authority of his age, or because he was the apostle of the circumcision; and some were for none of them, but Christ only. So liable are the best things in the world to be corrupted, and the gospel and its institutions, which are at perfect harmony with themselves and one another, to be made the engines of variance, discord, and contention. This is no reproach to our religion, but a very melancholy evidence of the corruption and depravity of human nature. Note, how far will pride carry Christians in opposition to one another!

I suggest to you, beloved, that perhaps the one cluster of verses that speaks most expressly to binding together the vitally-exhorted concepts of being united in Christian love, mind and accord that the scriptures press upon us again and again is found in Ephesians 4, where we are exhorted to "**keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**" I must admit that this was, for the longest time, a very puzzling phrase to me – the words used are simple words whose individual meanings seemed manifest enough. However, this string of words, placed together into that glorious commandment by the Holy Spirit of God, seem to reflect a comprehensive overcoming of the flesh and of putting off all of the infirmities and traps that our carnal reasoning bring us to that should dominate the heart, the communication and outlook of all the saints together. The remainder of this sermon will try to get at what this phrase and the verses around it instruct, that thereby we may come to at least one solid leaping off place to gain a more rich and useful understanding of the vitally-intertwining notions of love, unity, being of one accord and one mind. Consider the scripture:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some,

apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. – Eph. 4:1-16

Such rich yet compact language - pregnant with instruction for us to overcome our flesh and its deceptively selfish brand of thinking! Let us attempt a partial unpacking, one verse at a time.

v. 1 - I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, begins with some specific exhortations, implying that without which, our walk is unworthy of the vocation, or common faith and walk that we claim. In what follows, the two concepts of unity and love are opened up for us – a subject which should be a matter of much study and personal introspection for every Christian. We do not walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called if we be not faithful friends to all Christians, and sworn enemies to all sin. What follows is not only the exhortation to that love and unity, but the means and motivations to humbly and earnestly promote each.

v. 2 - With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

By these are meant the means of achieving unity. Lowliness means humility, or internally holding mean thoughts of ourselves, which is opposed to pride. False humility is a greatly deceitful sin – many men, though welled up in pride, maintain a veneer of humility. By meekness is meant here that excellent disposition of soul which makes men unwilling to provoke others to anger or prideful challenge, and is not easily to be provoked or offended with the anger, disputation and prideful challenges of others; it is opposed in every way to angry resentments and peevishness. (Peevishness is a great word, and describes the general, or prone disposition of many, many humans you will meet – it means easily irritated, and its synonyms include: irritable, fractious, fretful, cross, petulant, querulous, crabby, crotchety, cantankerous, curmudgeonly, sullen, grumpy, bad-tempered, short-tempered, touchy, testy, tetchy, snappish, and argumentative.) Long-suffering implies a patient bearing of injuries, without seeking revenge, ‘one-upsmanship’, needing to ‘win’ a position (as in forensic debate). Forbearing one another in love signifies bearing their infirmities, their shortcomings, their injuries inflicted, even their disagreeable idiosyncrasies, out of a principle of love, and so as not to cease to love them on the account of these. Although it might seem a trite, mnemonic device for reminding oneself of the import of its meaning, you see the last two words of the phrase are ‘in love’ – beloved, we are literally supposed to regard one another in that mode: that I am ‘in love’ with you, as you are the apple of His eye. When you are ‘in love,’ many things that would otherwise seem annoying or off-putting are seen as harmless and are purposefully disregarded as meaningful or worthy of consideration of character. The best Christians need to bear with each other, and to help each other in the best ways - to encourage, exhort and provoke one another’s graces, or the exercise of their spiritual gifts - not their passions.

Henry: We find much in ourselves which it is hard to forgive ourselves; and therefore we must not think it much if we find that in others which we think hard to forgive them, and yet we must forgive them as we forgive ourselves. Now without these things unity cannot be preserved. The first step towards unity is humility; without this there will be no meekness, no patience, or forbearance; and without these no unity. Pride and passion break the peace, and make all the mischief. Humility and meekness restore the peace, and keep it. Only by pride comes contention; and only by humility comes love. The more lowly-mindedness, the more like mindedness. We do not walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called if we be not meek and (really) lowly of heart: for he by whom we are called, he to whom we are called, was eminent for meekness and lowness of heart, and has commanded us therein to learn of him.

v. 3 - Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

That word 'endeavoring' there is translated from the Greek *spoudazo* – (*spoo'-dad-zo*), which means to hasten, to exert oneself, to labor or give diligence to, as in the sister verses that demand giving oneself to in all earnestness:

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. – Ec. 9:10

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; - Col. 3:23

The seat of Christian unity lies in the heart or spirit – not in one set of thoughts, nor in one form and mode of worship, but in one heart and one soul. This unity of heart and affection may be said to be of the Spirit of God; it is bound up in our exclusive capacity for spiritual reasoning, wrought by God in the giving of a portion of His Spirit to us, and is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is the gripping, desperately wicked, deceitful, depraved work of the carnal mind and heart to not give ourselves over completely to it. Endeavouring is a gospel word. We must do our utmost. If others will quarrel, debate, sharpen their forensic skills with us, or otherwise seem contentious (even in a moment), we must take all possible care not to quarrel with them. If others will despise and hate us, we must not despise and hate them. These are not maudlin sentiments – they are the express exhortation of our Sovereign God to us.

Henry: In the bond of peace. Peace is a bond, as it unites persons, and makes them live friendly one with another. A peaceable disposition and conduct bind Christians together, whereas discord and quarrelling disband and disunite their hearts and affections. Many slender twigs, bound together, become strong. Not that it can be imagined that all good people, and all the members of societies, should be in every thing just of the same length, and the same sentiments, and the same judgment (at all times): but the bond of peace unites them all together, (regardless of perceived differences at a given time). As in a bundle of rods, they may be of different lengths and different strength; but, when they are tied together by one bond, they are stronger than any, even than the thickest and strongest was of itself.

The unity of the Spirit does not imply that there is a way for men to anything to the oneness of the Holy Spirit of God, but as all born again of that same Spirit of God, there should be a unity of affection, confidence and love. And such a unity can only be produced by the Holy Spirit, as there was but one Spirit which had acted on our hearts to renew them, yet in the heart of man we retain both the capacity for and the proclivity to the proud, haughty, desperately wicked, deceitful, depraved work of the carnal mind and heart, and so the

endeavoring is real! Barnes suggests here that: *There was occasion among the Ephesians for this exhortation; for they were composed of Jews and Gentiles, and there might be danger of divisions and strifes, as there had been in other churches. There is always occasion for such an exhortation; for*

1. *unity of feeling is eminently desirable to honour the gospel, and*
2. *there is always danger of discord where men are brought together in one society. There are so many different tastes and habits; there is such a variety of intellect and feeling; the modes of education have been so various, and the temperament may be so different, that there is constant danger of division. Hence the subject is so often dwelt on in the scriptures, and hence there is so much need of caution and of care in the churches.*

In the bond of peace. This was to be by the cultivation of that peaceful temper (practiced habitually) which binds all together. The meaning here is, that they should be bound or united together in the sentiments and affections of peace. It is not mere external unity; it is not a mere unity of creed; it is not a mere unity in the forms of public worship; it is such as the Holy Spirit produces in the hearts of Christians, when he fills them all with the same love, and joy, and peace in believing.

Although we are filled with such a capacity, and our will does not confound such an operation, there is no way to flip that switch of a peaceful temper toward one another if the habit, or practice, is that of sowing to the flesh in the pride of our minds. We must constantly ask the Lord for help here.

v. 4 - *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;*

Here the Holy Spirit begins to provide a manifest of the motivations that should excite us to that endeavoring, producing both great joy at the truths expressed and great shame upon our realization of how often we act and think in opposition to that light when it comes to our outlook and demeanor toward each other. The apostle urges several, to persuade us thereto. This is a manifest of ‘ones’:

One body. One Spirit. One hope of your calling. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all.

Henry: There should be one heart; for there is one body (or one Church), and one Spirit. Two hearts in one body would be monstrous. If there be but one body, all that belong to that body should have one heart. The church is one mystical body of Christ, and all good Christians make up but one body, incorporated by one charter, that of the gospel, animated by one Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who by his gifts and graces quickens, enlivens, and governs that body. If we belong to Christ, we are all actuated by one and the same Spirit, and therefore should be one. Even as you are called in one hope of your calling. Hope is here put for its object, the thing hoped for, the heavenly inheritance, to the hope of which we are called. All Christians are called to the same hope of eternal life. There is one Christ that they all hope in, and one heaven that they are all hoping for; and therefore they should be of one heart.

v. 5 - *One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

Christ is appointed, in the counsel halls of eternity, as the Head of the church, to whom all Christians are immediately subject. The Spirit of God is spoken of in the previous verse, and God the Father in the following verse. The unity of mind, purpose and covenant of the Triune God cements the exhortation in that there should be no differences of outlook, mind or heart toward each other, as any such would be incongruent with the express providential purposes of God – and therefore wrong. There is but one faith - the Gospel, which contains

all doctrine of the Christian faith – and we know that perfectly construed, would contain not a whit of difference – and how our imperfect construal of it therefore calls for us to continually ask of the Lord for more light, patiently wait for it, and bear one another up in each of our imperfect construal of it. This one faith is the same God-given saving grace – that of faith in Christ - whereby all Christians are saved. We are all baptized into the same covenant by ordinance - by which we profess our faith, being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

v. 6 - One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Gill: there is but one God of Jews and Gentiles; nor is the unity of the Godhead inconsistent with a trinity of persons in it: and this one God is the Father of all; the Father of all mercies, and of all spirits, both angels and souls of men; and he is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of all the elect in him: and seeing that they have all one covenant God and Father, who has predestinated them to the adoption of children, and who has put them among the children, and adopted them into his family, and stand in the same relation to him, and enjoy the same privileges, they ought to love as brethren. who is above all; which may denote the superior excellency of his nature, not above his Son and Spirit, who are of the same nature with him, but above angels and men; and the extensiveness of his government, over all creatures in general, and over his church and people in particular: and through all - speaks to his providence, which is both universal, and reaches to all creatures his hands have made; and particular, and concerns his own chosen people, who belong to his family, and to whom he stands in the relation of a covenant God and Father: it may also refer to the perfections of his nature, which appear through the whole of the salvation of all the chosen ones; as his wisdom, love, grace, mercy, justice, holiness, truth, and faithfulness: and in you all - which is to be understood, not of his being in his creatures, by his powerful presence, which is everywhere supporting them; but of the gracious union there is between him and his people, and of his gracious habitation in them by his Spirit (the earnest of our inheritance, and that which supplies the capacity to sow to the spirit).

If then there be so many ‘ones’, there is an adamancy by the exhortation that there should be one more —one heart, or one soul. And this is not a foregone conclusion that it is achieved – as evidenced not only by the exhortation to it, but also our own hearts convict us of the matter when, not gripped by pride, we are able to clearly see its grip otherwise.

v. 7 - But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Consider the variety of gifts that Christ has bestowed among Christians:

Though the members of Christ’s church agree in so many things, yet there are some things wherein they differ: but this should breed no difference of affection among them, since they are all derived from the same bountiful author and designed for the same great ends. Unto every one of us Christians is given grace, some gift of grace, in some kind or degree or other, for the mutual help of one another. Unto every one of us ministers is given grace; to some a greater measure of gifts, to others a less measure. The different gifts of Christ’s ministers proved a great occasion of contention among the first Christians: one was for Paul, and another for Apollos. The apostle shows that they had no reason to quarrel about them, but all the reason in the world to agree in the joint use of them, for common edification; because all was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ, in such a measure as seemed best to Christ to bestow upon every one. Observe, All the ministers, and all the members of Christ, owe all the gifts and graces that they are possessed of to him; and this is a good reason why

we should love one another, because to every one of us is given saving grace. All to whom Christ has given grace, and on whom he has bestowed his gifts (though they are of different sizes, different names, and different sentiments, yet), ought to love one another. The apostle takes this occasion to specify some of the gifts which Christ bestowed. And that they were bestowed by Christ he makes appear by those words of David wherein he foretold this concerning him (#Ps 68:18),

v. 8 - Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

This is a rephrasing of a Messianic prophecy delivered by the Holy Spirit through the Psalmist:

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them. – Ps. 68:18

Henry: David prophesied of the ascension of Christ – and we may understand this both of the place into which he ascended in his human nature, that is, the highest heavens, and particularly of the state to which he was advanced, he being then highly exalted, and eminently glorified, by his Father. Let us set ourselves to think of the ascension of Jesus Christ: that our blessed Redeemer, having risen from the dead, is gone to heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high, which completed the proof of his being the Son of God. As great conquerors, when they rode in their triumphal chariots, used to be attended with the most illustrious of their captives led in chains, and were wont to scatter their largesses (generously bestowing gifts upon others) among the soldiers and other spectators of their triumphs, so Christ, when he ascended into heaven, as a triumphant conqueror, led captivity captive. It is a phrase used in the Old Testament to signify a conquest over enemies, especially over such as formerly had led others captive. Captivity is here put for captives, and signifies all our spiritual enemies, who brought us into captivity before. He conquered those who had conquered us; such as sin, the devil, and death. Indeed, he triumphed over these on the cross; but the triumph was completed at his ascension, when he became Lord over all, and had the keys of death and hell put into his hands. And he gave gifts unto men: in the psalm it is, He received gifts for men. He received for them, that he might give to them, a large measure of gifts and graces; particularly, he enriched his disciples with the gift of the Holy Ghost.

v. 9 - (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

This speaks to the humiliation of Christ on earth, and should therefore be encouraging to us – asked as a rhetorical question – implying that it was not only needful in Providence, but of no consequence whatsoever in eternity, as His ascension is complete and eternal. It refers either to his incarnation as the God Man, referring to the mysteries of God's works in the creation of the mechanisms of carnal creation:

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. – Ps. 139:15

Or to his burial, itself, similar to how the Psalmist describes the death and burial of men:

But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. – Ps. 63:9

He descended to the earth in his incarnation. He descended into the earth in his burial. As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so was the Son of man in the heart of the earth.

v. 10 - He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Henry: That is, far above the airy and starry (which are the visible) heavens, into the heaven of heavens; that he might fill all things, all the members of his church, with gifts and graces suitable to their several conditions and stations (and this is the encouragement that is tied to this verse as a vital following from the verse above – not at all a change of subject). Observe, Our Lord humbled himself first, and then he was exalted. He descended first, and then ascended.

v. 11 - And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Although He had already given out some gifts during his descension, or incarnation in this earth:

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. – Matt. 10:1

Henry: All of them were more solemnly installed, and publicly confirmed, in their office, by his visibly pouring forth the Holy Ghost in an extraordinary manner and measure upon them. Note, he great gift that Christ gave to the church at his ascension was that of the ministry of peace and reconciliation. The gift of the ministry is the fruit of Christ's ascension. And ministers have their various gifts, which are all given them by the Lord Jesus. The officers which Christ gave to his church were of two sorts — extraordinary ones advanced to a higher office in the church: such were apostles, prophets, and evangelists. The apostles were chief. These Christ immediately called, furnished them with extraordinary gifts and the power of working miracles, (and with certainty, clarity and depth) in delivering his truth; and, they having been the witnesses of his miracles and doctrine, he sent them forth to spread the gospel and to plant and govern churches. The prophets seem to have been such as expounded the writings of the Old Testament, and foretold things to come. The evangelists were ordained persons (2Ti 1:6), whom the apostles took for their companions in travel (Ga 2:1), and sent them out to settle and establish such churches as the apostles themselves had planted (Ac 19:22), and, not being solely fixed to any particular place, they were to continue till recalled, (2Ti 4:9). And then there are ordinary ministers, employed in a lower and narrower sphere; as pastors and teachers. Some take these two names to signify one office, implying the duties of ruling and teaching belonging to it. Others think they design two distinct roles, both ordinary, and of standing use in the church. And how rich is the church, that had at first such a variety of officers and has still such a variety of gifts! How kind is Christ to his church! How careful of it and of its edification! When he ascended, he procured the gift of the Holy Ghost; and the gifts of the Holy Ghost are various: some have greater, others have less measures; but all for the good of the body. The gifts of Christ were intended for the good of his church, and in order to advance his kingdom and interest among men. All these being designed for one common end is a good reason why all Christians should agree in brotherly love, and not envy one another's gifts (but only to covet the best gifts for the glory of God and for the edification of the saints).

v. 12 - For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

This is to encourage and restore those who, having been called, become dislocated and disjointed by sin, and then to strengthen them, and encourage and exhort them, provoking them rightly to love and to good works, each advancing the other, so that each, in his proper place and function, might contribute to the good of the whole body. This is for the edifying of the body of Christ – to build up the church, which is the body of Christ - by an increase of their graces, or gifts, by reason of use having their senses exercised to heightened discernment, and a watching for and addition of new members. All are designed to prepare us for heaven.

Gill: For the best of saints are imperfect; for though there is a perfection in them, as that designs sincerity, in opposition to hypocrisy, and as it may be taken comparatively with respect to what others are, or they themselves were; and though there is a perfection of parts of the new man in them, yet not of degrees; and though there is a complete perfection in Christ, yet not in themselves, their sanctification is imperfect, as their faith, knowledge, love, &c. sin is in them, and committed by them, and they continually want supplies of grace; and the best of them are sensible of their imperfection, and own it:

v. 13 - Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

The word ‘perfect’ here is rendered from the Greek *telios*, which has as its various meanings:

1. brought to its end, finished
2. wanting nothing necessary to completeness
3. consummate human integrity and virtue
4. of full age, mature

These words regard the continuance of the Gospel ministry in the church, until all the elect of God come in: I put forth here, beloved that the ‘unity of the faith’ here spoken of is not just a condition of being united in a common faith, but that it means the doctrine of faith, which is absolutely uniform at our perfection. Will there be any debate in heaven? The sense is, that the ministration of the Gospel will continue until the saints are entirely united in their senses and sentiments about it, and all see completely eye to eye.

And (unity) of the knowledge of the Son of God - *Gill: it is that grace by which a soul beholds his glory and fullness, approves of him, trusts in him, and appropriates him to itself; and such an approbatory, fiducial, appropriating, practical, and experimental knowledge of Christ, is here intended (in other words, in all ways, all circumstances and at all times); and which is imperfect in those that have it, and is not yet in many who will have it; and inasmuch as the Gospel ministry is the means of it, this will be continued until every elect soul partakes of it, and arrives to a greater perfection in it:*

Henry: by which we are to understand (of the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God), not a bare speculative knowledge, or the acknowledging of Christ to be the Son of God and the great Mediator, but such as is attended with appropriation and affection, with all due honour, trust, and obedience. — Unto a perfect man, to our full growth of gifts and graces, free from those childish infirmities (sins, carnal reasonings and dispositions) that we are subject to in the present world. — Unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, so as to be Christians of a full maturity and ripeness in all the graces derived from Christ’s fulness: or, according to the measure of that stature which is to make up the fulness of Christ, which is to complete his mystical body. Now we shall never come to the perfect man, till we come to the perfect world. There is a fulness in Christ, and a fulness to be derived from him; and a certain stature of that fulness, and a measure of that stature, are assigned in the counsel of God to every believer, and we never come to that measure till we come to heaven. God’s children, as long as they are in this world, are growing.

v. 14 - That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

That we no longer have weaknesses and infirmities in our faith, that our knowledge is full and mature, that our judgments are not inconstant, that we no longer yield to every temptation (that is personally deceiving to us), and that we are no longer at every one's back. Children are easily imposed upon in all these ways, and though many of us are adults and of advanced ages, experience-bases, educations and the like, yet it should not be lost on us that we are still compared to children in this perfecting process.

Of 'every wind of doctrine' (or false and inconstant doctrine), Barnes suggests:

So many persons are in regard to religious doctrines. They have no fixed views and principles. They hold no doctrines that are settled in their minds by careful and patient examination; and the consequence is, that they yield to every new opinion, and submit to the guidance of every new teacher. The doctrine taught here is, that we should have settled religious opinions. We should carefully examine what is truth, and having found it, should adhere to it, and not yield on the coming of every new teacher. We should not, however, close our minds against conviction. We should be open to argument, and be willing to follow the truth wherever it will lead us. But this state of mind is not inconsistent with having settled opinions, and with being firm in holding them until we are convinced that we are wrong. No man can be useful who has not settled principles. No one who has not such principles can inspire confidence or be happy – (though merely having adopted settled principles is not the thing); and the first aim of every young convert should be to acquire settled views of the truth, and to become firmly grounded in the doctrines of the gospel. Note, those must be very wicked and ungodly men who set themselves to seduce and deceive others into false doctrines and errors, in order to circumvent the weak, and draw them from the truth.

The apostle describes them here as base men, and Youtube, Facebook and Twitter are FULL of them. The best method we can take to fortify ourselves against such is to study the scriptures, and to pray for more light and grace of the Spirit of Christ, and realize that this light comes not just in the form of personal epiphany, but by the words that God gives to a brother or sister – so that antenna, or correct outlook toward each other expressed by the main thrust of this sermon - *endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* - is one main means to fortifying ourselves against such folly of men and of wrong ideas about God, that we may know the truth as it is in Jesus, and be established in it.

v. 15 - But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

Or follow the truth in love, or be sincere in love to our fellow Christians, with all of the rightly construed, earnest qualifiers given in verse 2 – *with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love*. While we adhere to the doctrine of Christ, which is the truth, and would never bargain any doctrine away, since our understanding of every point of doctrine and prophecy is not perfect, we should first and foremost endeavor to live in love one with another - as gaining as full a footing here, as possible, is that which enables us to *grow up into him in all things*.

Henry: Love is an excellent thing; but we must be careful to preserve truth together with it. Truth is an excellent thing; yet it is requisite that we speak it in love, and not in contention. These two should go together – truth and peace. That we should grow up into Christ in all things, which is the head, even Christ - so as to be more deeply rooted in him in all things; in knowledge, love, faith, and all the parts of the new man. We should grow up towards maturity, which is opposed to being children. Those are improving Christians who grow up into Christ.

The more we grow into an acquaintance with Christ, faith in him, love to him, dependence upon him, the more we shall flourish in every grace. He is the head; and we should thus grow, that we may thereby honour our head. The Christian's growth tends to the glory of Christ.

v. 16 - From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Henry: We should be assisting and helpful one to another (not just in situation, but in speech, humble demeanor, and being receptive to each other in heart), as members of the same body. Here the apostle makes a comparison between the natural body and Christ's mystical body, that body of which Christ is the head: and he observes that as there must be communion and mutual communications of the members of the body among themselves, in order to their growth and improvement, so there must be mutual love and unity, together with the proper fruits of these, among Christians, in order to their spiritual improvement and growth in grace. Observe, particular Christians receive their gifts and graces from Christ for the sake and benefit of the whole body. Unto the edifying of itself in love - we may understand this two ways: — Either that all the members of the church may attain a greater measure of love to Christ and to one another; or that they are moved to act in the manner mentioned from love to Christ and to one another. Observe, mutual love among Christians is a great friend to spiritual growth (and the absence of which is an obstinate hindrance): it is in love that the body edifies itself; whereas a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" is never to be construed or exposition constructed that gives any quarter to bargaining away the doctrine – when rightly construed, it has the reverse effect. When our outlook toward one another is totally informed by the meanings of the words of scripture around that exhortation, and thereby a rich and precise meaning of it and a fuller exercise of it, we are able to more fully hear, understand, and bear with one another. And that enhanced understanding, in view of the cross, enables us to better help one another in all our ministrations toward each other as true brothers and sisters in Christ and as joint heirs of the kingdom of God, and thereby follow Christ more fully.

I love you all. Amen