

Spiritual Union

Preached at North Street Chapel, Stamford, on Lord's Day Morning, Nov. 15, 1857

"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." Ephes. 4:4, 5, 6

In that wondrous prayer which the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great High Priest over the house of God, offered up to his heavenly Father on the eve of his sufferings and death, there is one petition of singular weight and significance. Pleading for the whole body of his disciples, our blessed Intercessor put up on their behalf this remarkable request, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." And as if not content with merely expressing this petition once, he repeats it in the subsequent verse: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." (John 17:21, 23.) I do not know, in the whole compass of God's word, a passage of deeper import, and yet, as received by faith, one of greater blessedness. When we look at the incomprehensible, ineffable union which subsists between the Father and the Son as expressed in the words, "As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee," then to believe that the Church of God is to be one in the Father and in the Son with the same close and mysterious union as exists between these two Persons of the sacred Trinity—the very thought overwhelms us with wonder and amazement.

As it is not my present object to unfold the nature of the union between the Father and the Son I shall content myself

with thus simply referring to it. But when we look at the aspect of things generally in this day of great profession, do we see union in the Church of Christ as a standing, visible fact? At least, do we behold it so manifestly visible as the Lord prayed that it might be, so that the world itself might see and acknowledge it? For he adds, "That the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Who that knows anything of the present state of the Church of God can deny that strife and division are far more its prominent features than love and union; and that even in the most gracious and spiritual churches there is a sad lack of brotherly kindness, tender sympathy, and Christian affection? Instead of bearing each other's burdens, some seem most pleased when they can put an extra load on their brother's back; and others, like the petrel, appear most in their element in a storm, or, like the gull, to feed best when the wave of contention brings most garbage to shore.

How, then, it may be asked, can this prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ for union amongst his people be fulfilled? Is it possible, faith inquires, that any petition of our interceding High Priest should fall to the ground? Did not the Lord himself appeal to his heavenly Father that his prayer must ever prevail, when he said, in all the meekness and confidence of filial love, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I knew that thou hearest me always?" (John 11:41, 42.) Can we then for a moment entertain the suspicion that the blessed Lord could utter a petition which his Father would not hear? Carry such a supposition out, and where will it land you but into open infidelity? We must therefore hold firm and fast by this conclusion, that the petition of Jesus was heard and answered, and that there is, or one day will be, a union between the mystical members of the body of Christ as close and as intimate as that which joins together Father and Son in one mysterious essence. If, then, we are still closely

pressed with the inquiry how we can reconcile with this intimate and indissoluble union the strifes and divisions that we see everywhere so prevalent in the Church of God, we may answer that we can reconcile it in these two ways: first, by looking forward to that happy season when the members of the mystical body of Christ will all be brought together; when he, as the glorious head, and they, as the glorified members, will form one complete harmonious body; when all the jars and divisions of a time-state will utterly cease, and perfect love and perfect holiness will reign for ever and ever. Or we may reconcile it thus: that though there are divisions and contentions in the Church of God, yet that the union of member with member is not really affected thereby; in other words, that their union is so vital and so substantial, that the various differences which exist, and which are deeply to be lamented, do not seriously affect it.

We may see, by way of example, this firmness of union in the very face of evident disunion existing in natural objects. Take, for instance, a tree. Look at a noble oak, as it stands in all its native grandeur in a nobleman's park. How far some of the branches are separated from one another; how others grow across each other; and when the wind roughly blows, how they rub against and chafe each other. A person viewing this angry clashing of bough against bough, might say, "What little union there is between the branches of that tree; for see how instead of mutually supporting each other, half of them are on opposite sides, and those which are closest in connection, as soon as the breeze blows only rub and chafe the bark off one another, and sometimes bring down a very shower of buds and leaves." Yet who would assert that either the mutual distance or the rude blows that they give each other destroy or even impair the substantial union which pervades every branch, as being all united in one common stem? Dead branches tied up into a faggot—emblem of a

dead church—would it is true lie more closely together, and would not chafe each other. But who would not prefer the living tree with its clashing boughs to a bundle of dry and withered sticks? Or look at a family, all sprung from the same parents, all bearing the same name, and having a common relationship, not only of birth and blood, but of mutual interest, so that the honour or disgrace of one is to the glory or shame of all, and the benefit or loss of one is to the advantage or injury of all. But fathers and sons, brothers and sisters, are not always united. Differences arise, family quarrels, which may keep them at times very distant from each other, and not only much mar their happiness from within, but give much occasion to reproach from without. But still, family jars and family quarrels do not destroy the original union which knits them together as sprung from the same common stock, as bearing the same name, and having in the main the same family interests. Or take another case, one of closer union still, that of man and wife, who are one flesh. Though bound together in so close, so intimate, so endearing a tie, they may not always be united on every point; there may be differences of opinion in minor matters where love and affection most reign and there may even be at times between them not that harmony and love which should exist in a relationship so close and so tender. Yet these differences do not affect the reality of the union nor the strength of their mutual love: they are still man and wife, still one flesh, still very fond of each other, though there may be occasional jars and differences which for a time interrupt that union and harmony which should subsist between them. So in the church of God: there are painful divisions in most churches, and much jealousy and suspicion at work beneath, which either grace subdues, or at least they smoulder without bursting into a flame. Yet where the life of God is, and of such only I speak, all these differences do not really affect the substantial union which knits them together as

members of the body of Jesus.

But whilst I believe this, I still deeply lament that any difference should separate the living family of God; and I declare before all of you who believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ that such divisions are very grievous, and that it is the duty and privilege of every Christian man to strive after manifest union with the saints of God, and especially with those amongst whom his lot is cast; that he is bound to lay aside all matters that cause dissension and strife, and to seek, as far as lies in his power, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." But be not deceived in this matter. It is not easy to talk of love and union when your heart is full of strife and bitterness. Without tenderness of feeling and real humility of spirit, there is no walking in union with the children of God, for "only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10); and if you would live with them in peace and affection it is only by walking "worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." (Eph. 4:1, 2.)

You will perhaps remember that the passage which I have just quoted immediately precedes the words of our text, in which the apostle urges upon believers to endeavour "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" by showing what is the foundation of that union, and how it is not only generated, but how maintained amongst the members of the mystical body of the Lord Jesus.

In opening up these words, therefore, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour

I.—*First*, to show *the unity* of the body: "*There is one body.*"

II.—*Secondly*, what is the *foundation* and *source* of this unity, which is no less than the three Persons of the undivided Godhead, as 1, "*one God and Father* of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all;" 2, "*one Lord*," the Lord Jesus Christ, God's co-equal and co-eternal Son; and 3, "*one Spirit*," that is, the Blessed Spirit. So that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in their separate and several relationships to the Church of God, form the grand foundation, as well as the spiritual source and spring of the union of the mystical body of Christ.

III.—*Thirdly*, what I may perhaps be allowed to call *the cementing bands* of this heavenly union, which are "*one faith, one hope, and one baptism*," whereby all the living members are spiritually knit together into the blessed enjoyment of mutual peace, harmony, and love.

I.—"*There is one body*." This is the body of Christ, as the apostle elsewhere speaks, "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27); and again, in the chapter before us, "For the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12.) But the Scripture speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ having two distinct bodies: one *real*, the other *mystical*. Let us take a glance at each, that we may see what is intended here. The Lord Jesus, then, has a real body which he took in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and which the Father had prepared for him, according to those words: "A body hast thou prepared me. Then said I, lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will O God." (Heb. 10:5, 7.) By this body prepared for him, is meant, however, not only the material body, that is, the actual flesh, bones, and blood which the Lord assumed, but the whole of his sacred humanity, consisting of a perfect human body and a perfect human soul, which the Lord Jesus took at one and the same instant into union with his divine Person when he

was made flesh for us. This we may call his *real* body, as distinguished from his *mystical* body; the actual living body in which during his time-state here below he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, wept, sweat in the garden drops of blood, agonised upon the cross; and which he offered, together with his soul, as a sacrifice for sin upon the altar of his own divinity when he laid down his precious life at Calvary. This is his *real* body, which was raised from the dead, wherein he ascended into heaven, and which he now wears—identically the same, though infinitely glorified—at the right hand of the Majesty on high. In this body he will come a second time without sin unto salvation, when, in union with his Deity, it will shine forth with all the wondrous splendour which it now wears on the throne of his glory—a splendour which all shall behold; for "every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him" (Rev. 1:7); but of that surpassing brightness which, while it fills the hearts of his saints with unutterable joy, will so appal the ungodly that they will call upon "the mountains and rocks to fall upon them and hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16.)

But the Lord Jesus has another body, which is usually termed his *mystical* body. This is the body spoken of in our text, as also in many other passages; as, for instance, "Not holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment, ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." (Col. 2:19.) And again, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22, 23.) The church, then, according to these testimonies, is Christ's mystical body, the members of which consist of all the elect of God, elsewhere spoken of as "the church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." (Heb. 12:23.) But we must bear in mind that as the

word "church" is used in two different senses in the New Testament, so it is with the mystical "body" of Christ. It has two distinct significations, meaning, 1, first, the whole collected assembly of the elect; and, 2, secondly, distinct gospel churches in this time-state. I have already named several passages where the body of Christ means, as in our text, the whole collective members, and I will now mention one where a gospel church is called by that term. You will find it 1 Cor. 12., where the apostle opening up the subject of spiritual gifts, shows that they are diversely distributed to the members of the body of Christ, of which a visible church consists. One, he says, is a foot, another a hand, another an eye, another an ear, all of which expressions imply that he is speaking of the different gifts and graces of members of a gospel church, for, ascribing the whole to the goodness and wisdom of God, he says, "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body." Is not this truly applicable to a gospel church in the exercise of the spiritual gifts bestowed upon the various members? One is an eye, having a clear discernment of spiritual things, and able to see almost at a glance where there is a real work of grace and where a mere profession; another is an ear, to "try words, as the mouth tasteth meat" (Job 34:3); another a hand, to minister liberally to the wants of God's saints; another a foot, cheerfully to toil and and trudge on the errands of the church, to be the least and lowest, and yet the most useful and serviceable. And all these members, however different from one another,—for how widely the eye differs from the ear, the ear from the foot, and the foot from the hand!—yet all are component parts of the same mystical body; all have equal union with Christ, their living Head; each is set by divine appointment and by divine power in its peculiar place to do the work that God has intended, and that as no other

member could do.

Whether, then, we view the "one body" spoken of in our text as the collective body of Christ in its aggregate form, as embracing the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, which I think is its meaning, or as a gospel church here below, the force of the words is the same. It is still "one body." This is its glory and this is its strength; and by this it is distinguished in heaven and in earth from all other societies and assemblies which, compared with the mystical body of Christ, are but ropes of sand or disorderly mobs.

II.—But we will now see what is the foundation and source of the union of which the apostle speaks in our text, when he insists on the unity of the one body. I have already intimated that the foundation of this union is nothing less than the three Persons of the undivided Godhead. This, then, is the point which I have now to open up.

i. This union of the mystical body of Christ rests first, then, on *God the Father*, according to the words, "There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Four things are here said of, four blessings ascribed to, the one God and Father of the members of Christ's mystical body.

1. *First*, he is "the God and Father of *them all*." This constitutes them members of one and the same family; for as in an earthly family, all the children derive their origin from one and the same father, so in a higher sense there is one God and Father of all the family of heaven. As being, then, all his sons and daughters, they have the same family

name, the same family ties, and the same family interests, because they have the same family origin. In this sense, the glorified spirits above, those whom the apostle calls "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), are one with the saints still on earth, which made Paul say, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." (Eph. 3:14, 15.) But, as regards those still in the body here below, some in this family are but "babes" in the mother's lap, only just able to draw the breasts of consolation and feed upon the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby (1 Pet. 2:2); others are "little children" farther advanced in growth, who prattle and lisp of the things of God, and speak with childlike simplicity of the glory of Christ's kingdom and talk of his power, as they have seen and felt them; others again are "young men," active and strong in faith and love, full of warmth, energy, and zeal, who fight the Lord's battles against evil and error, and are often personally and hotly engaged in painful conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil, but by faith overcome the wicked one; and others are "fathers," not merely by age but also by experience, whom the Lord the Spirit has matured and ripened in the things of God, whom he has led through many conflicts, trials, and temptations, and thus established them firmly and soundly in the faith of the gospel. Now though these differ widely in age, gifts, experience, and grace, yet they all are members of the same living family; for there is one God and Father of them all.

2. But this one God and Father of all is said also to be "*above all.*" How this expression leads our minds to look up to that great and glorious Jehovah who, in the infinity of his Being, is above all men and all circumstances. As the expanse of heaven is above the earth, and above it infinitely, so is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ above all the passing

scenes of this lower creation. As ever visibly before our eyes, earth seems to us a mighty domain. It has its lofty mountains, its deep valleys, its flowing rivers, its umbrageous woods, its waving crops, its green fields, its roaring sea, its sandy beach; and, all these seem enough and more than enough to fill every eye and heart, as if all creation here began and terminated. But when we look upward on a clear summer night and view the spangled sky, what are all the mere scanty elements of sight and sound which earth yields compared with the blue expanse that arches over all? What are mountains or valleys, seas or rivers, in magnitude, height, or depth, compared with the heavens stretched with their blue vault above all, gemmed with millions of stars, shining forth in all their placid beauty? So God is so infinitely above all men and things, however seemingly great and glorious, that, compared with the infinity of his eternal Being, all earthly distinctions sink into nothing. As in nature the highest mountain is but a grain of sand compared with the blue arch of heaven; so in religion, what are all attainments, gifts, graces, knowledge and experience, compared with the infinite majesty, the ineffable glory, the boundless grace of the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? And see how this blessed truth that God is "above all" bears upon the point in hand—the unity of the body of Christ. We, to our shame be it spoken, too often quarrel and fight with one another; but all our family differences, even our family jars and quarrels, are as nothing in comparison with the boundless magnitude of God's care for each, and the infinite love and affection which he bears towards all the members of the mystical body of Jesus. He is "above all" our quarrels, strifes, contentions, jars, jealousies, suspicions, and surmises,—yea, above all our thoughts and ways, words and works: for he sits upon the throne of his Majesty, viewing men as so many grasshoppers under his feet; for, as the prophet so sublimely speaks: "Behold, the

nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing." (Isai. 40:15.) When, then, we look up and see that he is not only the God and Father of all the members of Christ's mystical body, but "above all" their differences, as well as all their attainments, we should not only love them as his children, but should mutually bear and forbear with them, as seeing how vain and foolish are all our petty strifes compared with the grace and mercy of God above us and above them.

3. And he is "*through all*," for as God he pervades by his Spirit all his living family. As the air may be said to be "through" everything, as rushing through every place with its mighty breath, pervading every spot, entering into the closest room through every crevice and cranny, as well as filling every region on this habitable earth with its influence, presence, and power; so God the Father pervades with his Spirit, presence, and grace, and, if I may use such an expression, with his holy breath, the soul of every one of whom he is the Father. May we not, then, say that in this sense he is "*through all*" the family of God, not indeed so manifestly, yet not less really, than on the day of Pentecost he was by his Spirit "through all" the apostles, when "suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting?" (Acts 2:2.) If believers are "a habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22); if they are his temple in whom he dwells (2 Cor. 6:16); if he act by them, and speak through them (Mark 13:11); and if this is the peculiar and sole privilege of his children, may not God be said not only to be the Father *of* them all, and *above* them all, but also to be *through* them all?

4. But he is also "*in them all*" by his manifested indwelling

presence, by his shed abroad love, and by taking up his abode in their hearts. "Will God in very deed dwell with men on earth?" asked Solomon in admiring awe. (2 Chron. 6:18.) Yes, he will; he does; for he dwells amongst his saints, as he said of old: "And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8.) That sanctuary is Christ; for his sacred humanity is "the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man." (Heb. 8:2.) Christ dwells in the hearts of his people, as the apostle prays (Eph. 3:17); and God dwells in Christ, as the Lord himself speaks, "I in them and thou in me." (John 17:23.) Thus as God dwells in Christ, and Christ dwells in his people, it may truly be said that God is "*in* them all" by his presence and love. The apostle, therefore, urging union among them, would imply by this, "What are your differences of opinion, your strifes and contentions, compared with this high privilege, this great and glorious blessing?" If there is one God and Father of you all, who is above all, through all, and in you all, does not this call upon you to walk in love and union with each other? If so great, so glorious a Guest dwell in you all, can you, will you, lodge by his side what he so abhors as strife among brethren? If he whose name, whose nature is "love," live in you, can you not love another when he by his love dwells alike in all your hearts? "What a foundation for union is this! What a perennial spring, ever gushing forth in thoughts, words, and works of the tenderest and warmest Christian affection!

ii. But there is another foundation of the unity of the body of Christ. There is "*one Lord.*" This one Lord is the blessed Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who is called again and again in the Scriptures of the New Testament, "our Lord," and here "one Lord." The reason why he bears that honoured, that worthy name is not far to seek. He is the Church's risen Head, to whom she owes implicit submission,

and to whom she yields up her obedience as well as her affections, for he sits upon the throne of her heart, swaying every faculty of her soul in willing obedience to his sceptre. He thus becomes our one, our only Lord: "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many and lords many); but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (1 Cor. 8:5, 6.) If he has in any way, then, manifested himself to our souls, has he not a right to every affection of our heart; a claim to every obedience of our willing mind? When the Holy Ghost says to us what he said to the church of God of old, "He is thy Lord; and worship thou him" (Psal. 45:11); we can answer, "Other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name." (Isai. 26:13.) He becomes our Lord when by grace we listen to and obey his own words: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:29.) In bowing to his yoke, we own him as our Lord; for then he becomes our Sovereign, our Head, claiming at our hands not mere lip-service, but all holy obedience to his precepts, for he himself declares: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21.)

But the apostle in the text, as urging upon believers Christian union, does it on this ground, that to them there is "one Lord." Here, then, is another bond of union that knits together the mystical members of the body of Christ, another foundation of mutual affection, another well-spring of brotherly love. If he is my Lord, I submit to him as such; I adore him, worship him, receive him into my heart, seek to know his will and do it. If he is your Lord, you do the same: you seek to know him more and more, to worship him in

Spirit and in truth, to reverence his name and word, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. Then if he is my Lord and your Lord, we serve one common Master; we are bound by one and the same allegiance; we owe him the same holy obedience; we are both seeking to know and to do one will; and we are both striving, or should strive, to please him who has taken his seat upon the throne of our affections. Therefore all divisions and strifes must yield in his presence. What should we think of courtiers quarreling in the presence of the Queen? Every contending voice is hushed in the presence of Majesty. Whatever contention may exist in the antechamber, whatever crowding and crushing there for place or precedence, when they come into the presence of the Sovereign all is quiet and respectful submission. Is it not, or should it not be so, in grace? When we by faith are brought into the presence of our common Lord, to worship him as our risen Head, to serve him as obedient subjects, and to stand before his throne in silent submission to his will, should not every contending breath be hushed? What could be more unseemly than to quarrel in the very presence of the Lord himself? The disciples, on one occasion, "disputed among themselves who should be greatest;" but it was not in the immediate presence of their Master, and they held their peace for very shame when the Lord asked them the cause of their dispute. (Mark 9:33, 34.) Has he not as our Lord given us a new commandment that we love one another? (John 13:34.) And how can we better show that we obey him than by doing what he bids?

iii. A third grand foundation of Christian union is, that there is "*one Spirit.*" This one Spirit is the Holy Ghost, by whom all the members of the mystical body are in the first instance awakened from their sleep of death, quickened into spiritual life by divine power, and thus made alive unto God. Every grace and gift which the members of Christ's mystical body

possess they receive from this one Spirit, who thus baptizes them into one body, as the apostle speaks: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13.) Thus, though the people of God differ widely in gifts and attainments, and have very different measures of grace, yet they are all made to repent of their sins with godly sorrow by one Spirit; they are all enabled to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God by one Spirit; they are all taught to pray by one Spirit, who, "as the Spirit of grace and supplications," helps them to pour out their hearts before the throne, to seek the Lord's face, to call upon his name, and offer up those spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Yea, he himself, as their inward Intercessor, "helpeth their infirmities," and himself "intercedeth for them with groanings which cannot be uttered." (Rom. 8:26.) No band is or can be so strong as a spiritual union. Change and mutability are stamped upon all mere earthly ties, however strong they for the moment appear. But a spiritual union is for ever. And bear in mind that it is "one Spirit" that knits together into this spiritual and enduring union all the members of Christ's mystical body who have received life from their covenant Head, and that he breathes one and the same spirit into every living soul. There are not two spirits in the Church of God—a spirit of love and a spirit of strife; a spirit of union and a spirit of disunion; a spirit of affection and a spirit of enmity; a spirit of peace and a spirit of war; a spirit of humility and a spirit of pride; a spirit of harmony and a spirit of contention. It is but one Spirit, though his operations, at least as regards gifts, are different, for "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." (1 Cor. 12:4, 5, 6.) However then these

gifts may differ in kind, or grace vary in depth or degree, it is still one Spirit, for "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (1 Cor. 12:11); and it is because it is one Spirit that quickens, animates, influences, pervades, and permeates the whole members of Christ's mystical body, that they are knit together in the bands of Christian affection and love.

How strong, then, is this spiritual union, how substantial the foundation on which it rests; how full of life and blessedness the overflowing spring whence it takes its rise, and by which it is perpetually and unceasingly fed. When by faith we view the three Persons of the sacred Godhead all uniting to create and cement it, we see Almighty power and eternal love engaged on its behalf. When, then, we look up and see God the Father as the "*Father of all*" who fear his great name, "*above all*" by his power and love, "*through all*" by his Spirit and grace, and "*in all*" by his indwelling presence: what a bond of union is this! When, again, we look up and see the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, seated on his throne of grace and glory, and we can call to mind what he was upon earth, and what sorrows he endured for his dear people, that he shed his sacred blood for their sake, endured shame and suffering for their sake; died, rose again, and ascended for their sake; and now reigns and rules as Lord and Sovereign over all, swaying by the sceptre of his grace the heart of every saint: what a foundation of the oneness of the body as a fact, and of Christian union as a fruit, do we find to subsist in him? When we look up a third time and see the Holy Ghost, the third Person of the glorious Godhead, proceeding from the Father and the Son, and view by faith how he comes down in his gifts, graces, quickenings, enlightenings, teachings, and in his various other operations into the heart of every saint of God, we see what a foundation there is for Christian union there. Thus the oneness of the body of Christ

is not a mere floating idea of brain-sick enthusiasts, not a cunningly devised fable of crafty, designing hypocrites as a means of obtaining power or pelf, but a divine reality, whose foundation is nothing less than a Triune God. And Christian union, as a fruit of this antecedent oneness, is not a mere agreement of opinion with a certain sect or party; not a mere assent and consent to the same creed; or even a being bound together in the bond of a visible church, but something spiritual, heavenly, and divine, and therefore in its very nature, and from its very origin, far more substantial and enduring than any earthly tie. Look at mere natural bonds. How soon the closest and tenderest are scattered to the winds! Take that of a young family, all growing up as olive plants round about their parents' table. How pleasing the sight; but how brief the duration. How fair the blossom; how often blighted the fruit. The father, perhaps "dieth," as Job speaks, "in his full strength, when his bones are moistened with marrow" (Job 21:23, 24); the broken-hearted mother follows him to an early grave; one son emigrates to Australia; another settles in a distant part of England; a third is wrecked at sea; a fourth dies prematurely of consumption; the daughters marry and have families of their own. Where now is that happy family once so united in their youthful home? A vision of yesterday, a mournful recollection of the past, as shadowy and as unsubstantial to the survivors as the last night's dream. Or look at the tie of man and wife, the strongest, as well as the closest, sweetest, and tenderest that we can have here below; the fairest relic of Eden, the most lively emblem of the union of Christ and his Church! How soon that may be snapped in twain by the death of one or the other, and no mourning of the bereaved one can bring the loved object back. And look at earthly friendships how weak their foundation, how frail their tenure! A word, a look, an unjust suspicion, or a lying tale, may for ever separate those who once were bosom friends. And even

what are called or supposed to be religious friendships are often rudely rent asunder, and those who once seemed to love each other in the warmest manner become cold and indifferent to each other's interests, if not secret or open enemies; proving that nature not grace, agreement of creed not union of heart, was the foundation of the whole. It is the very nature, the inseparable condition of all earthly ties, to be of a fleeting, vanishing nature; as fleeting as life itself, as vanishing as the creatures of a day, that, like gnats in a sunbeam, sport their noon and die before night. But the bond of which I have been speaking—the oneness of the mystical body of Christ and the spiritual union of the children of God with each other—is so substantial, so abiding, and so indissoluble, because its foundation is not in earth, but in heaven; not in time, but eternity; not in the flesh, but in the spirit; based not on man, but on the very Triune God himself.

If, then, we see this by the eye of faith and believe in our very conscience that these are most certain and blessed truths, should we not seek to realize them in our hearts, and manifest our belief of them by our lips and lives? It is most important, I might say indispensable, for his peace of conscience, that every child of God should realize in his own soul two things: 1, his union with Christ; 2, his union with the people of Christ. Love is the evidence by which both are realized. By love shed abroad in his heart, he realizes the blessedness of knowing that he is one with Christ by eternal ties, and by a direct and spiritual relationship; and by love he realizes his union with the members of Christ's mystical body by knowing for himself the truth of those heavenly words, "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." (1 John 3:14.)

He who knows nothing of love to God knows nothing of God, as holy John speaks, "He that loveth not knoweth not God;

for God is love." (1 John 4:8.) And he that loves not the people of God has no evidence of spiritual life; for, as the same inspired testimony declares, "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (1 John 3:14.)

III.—But besides the foundation on which the actual oneness of Christ's mystical body, and spiritual union as the fruit of it rest, there are *uniting bonds* called by the apostle in another place "joints and bands," which, as so many internal ligaments, so many living and active joints, knit and bind the whole body together. (Col. 2:19.) If we view Christ's mystical body as a temple, we may call them *cementing bands*, not external to the building, as props and buttresses to shore up a falling structure, or as iron girders driven round it to repair internal decay, but like bond work built up together with the edifice, and strengthening every part alike. These internal ligaments or cementing bands are three, and the firmness of their union, as well as the strength of their cement, are derived from their spiritual oneness in every member: "*one faith, one hope, one baptism.*"

1. The first connecting ligament or cementing band is "*one faith.*" This is the grand distinguishing mark of a Christian. By it he is made and called a believer. A man called upon me some time ago to sell me a book, the title of which was "The Book of Faiths." In this book he had classified all the faiths of all the world. Heathen, Mahometan, Jew, Papist, Protestant, all were down in his book. This is just the world's book, the very spirit of Pope's Universal Prayer—

"Jehovah, Jove, or Lord;"

as if so many men so many faiths, and all equally good, equally acceptable to God, if only sincere. How strongly, as he was showing me his book full of choice engravings of the

different kinds of worship, the words struck my mind, "One faith." O my friends, there is only "one faith," and that the pure gift of God's grace. As the apostle declares, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. 2:8.) It is also spoken of as one of the fruits of the Spirit; for when the apostle enumerates the various fruits of the Spirit, he mentions faith amongst them: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." (Gal. 5:22.) If, then, the special gift of God and the fruit of the Spirit, can there be as many faiths as there are creeds? as many believers as worshippers? If so, the worship of Baal is as good as the worship of Jehovah; and faith in Mahomet is equal to faith in Jesus Christ. As the gift of God, it must be one; for God has but one faith to give. It must necessarily also be one as having one author, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is spoken of as "the author of our faith;" one finisher, for he who is the author is also the finisher; and one object, the same blessed Lord. One text combines the whole three: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." (Heb. 12:1, 2.) It is one also as having one *end*—salvation: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:9.) Having, then, one author, one finisher, one object, and one end, it can be but one faith. Again, if we look at the *operation* of this faith, you will see that it is and can be but one. It worketh by love (Gal. 5:6); and as love is but one, the faith that works by it must be one also. This is faith's grand test—the proof of its heavenly birth—for false faith cannot work by love, there being no union between nature and grace. But spiritual faith can and does work by love: for it comes from the same source, God, who is love; dwells in the same heart as the fruit of the same Spirit (Gal. 5:22); and obtains the same eternal recompense in the fruition of endless bliss. It is also "one faith" as alone overcoming the

world; for there is but one faith that gains this mighty victory. This is John's noble challenge, where he proclaims aloud, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" It is as if he looked around him and saw what the world was and what the men were who live in it: the world how strong, man how weak. This man he saw overcome by the lust of the flesh; another by the lust of the eye; a third by the pride of life. Looking down from his watch tower upon the crowd below, he saw them all, man after man, sink and fall, and most of them to rise no more, under the chariot wheels of the conquering world; but amongst the vanquished mass he descried one who was able to overcome it, and he saw how this man won the victory, which was by faith, and that upon a special object, the Son of God. Seeing, then, that this man was the victor when all the others were vanquished, he cried aloud as in holy triumph, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4, 5.)

Again, there is only one faith that can *purify the heart*. (Acts 15:9.) if the heart of man, that cage of unclean birds, is ever purified from the guilt, filth, power, love, and practice of sin, it must be by something of a different nature from that which pollutes it. Now a natural faith is a polluted faith, for, springing from our corrupt nature, it necessarily partakes of its corruption. But a polluted faith can no more purify a polluted heart than foul water can cleanse foul clothes. It must be pure faith, flowing out of the Redeemer's fulness as the water from his wounded side, which can alone purify the heart from the pollutions of sin. The effect of this is "to purify the soul in obeying the truth through the Spirit." (1 Pet. 1:22.) The apostle in Heb. 11. gives us a long account of the faith of the Old Testament saints, mentioning their names

and enumerating their exploits. Yet but one faith, the faith of God's elect, dwelt in all their breasts. Abel had not one kind of faith, Enoch another, Noah a third, and Abraham a fourth; but each that one which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Believers are said, therefore, "to walk in the steps of the faith of their father Abraham" (Rom. 4:12); and the apostle declares that he and they, to whom he wrote had "the same spirit of faith" with David, when he said, "I believed and therefore have I spoken." (Psalm 116:10; 2 Cor. 4:13.) Does not all this show that one and the same faith dwells in the breast of every child of God now? And thus every true believer has union and communion with all the saints of God who have ever lived on earth, from the days of righteous Abel up to the present moment. What a uniting band is this knitting together the whole mystical body! But if so, why should there be strife and division among the people of God? If you had a natural and I a spiritual faith, or the reverse; or if I were looking at one Object and you at another; if we did not believe in the same blessed Lord, we might well differ. But if I believe in God and you believe in God; if I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; if we both believe in the same atoning blood, in the same justifying obedience, in the same dying love, in the same finished work, in the same salvation by grace; and if my faith works as your faith does, by the same operation, under the same influence, to the same end, and with the same effects and fruits, then surely that one and the same faith should be a knitting joint, a cementing band, between you and me. Why should we quarrel then and dispute about a few minor matters, which, as compared with life spiritual and life eternal, are but as the small dust of the balance? We might do so if we had two different faiths, or believed in two different Lords; but having the same faith in the same Lord, it is a connecting band not only to knit you and me together,

but us both to all the members of the mystical body of Christ. Is not this, then, a blessed motive to induce us to endeavour with all our power "to walk in love as Christ also hath loved us?"

2. Again, there is but "*one hope*," which is in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is emphatically called "the hope of Israel" (Jer. 14:8), and "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1), as being the only object of hope. "Let Israel hope in the Lord" (Psal. 130:7); "In thee, O Lord, do I hope." (Psal. 38:15.) "Hope thou in God," was David's cheering word to his cast down, disquieted soul. (Psal. 42:11.) But this hope, as a knitting bond of the mystical body, a cementing band of the living temple of Christ, is but one. There can no more betwo saving hopes, "for we are saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24), than there can be two saving faiths. Were there no other proof, we should find one in the words of our text, "Even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." There can be but one true effectual calling, and a good hope through grace springs out of it. Apply this to your hope. What does your hope of eternal life spring from? If you were asked to give a reason of the hope that is in you, what account should you give? Would it not be intimately connected with your call by grace? You would say, "It is because the Lord has in times past done something for my soul. He called me by his grace when I neither knew, nor feared, nor loved him; made me pass under the rod, convinced me of sin and my lost, ruined state; and, after a time, revealed his dear Son in me. His word has come with power to my heart, his promises have comforted my soul, and his visitations have preserved my spirit. And all these marks of my heavenly calling have given me a sweet hope in his mercy, to which I cleave as an anchor of my soul both sure and stedfast." Having this hope in your soul, you are led to converse with another child of God, and you seem to want to know the ground of his hope also, that you may have

sweet union and fellowship with him, for you feel drawn out in affection toward him from what you have seen in or heard of him. He tells you of what the Lord has done for his soul; how God began the work of grace upon his heart; what trouble and distress he felt, and how the Lord in due season delivered him, and from time to time has blessed him with promises, with smiles, and with words of encouragement in hours of darkness and trouble. You feel at once a sweet union with him, and, in the openness of your heart and the warmth of your affection, you say, "I am convinced that God has begun a good work in you. What you have been telling me is commended to my conscience. I have union with you, because I feel of the same spirit with you." In this way "those that feared the Lord" in times of old "spake often one to another" (Mal. 3:16), and thus obtained and maintained mutual union and communion. But if he can tell you nothing of what God has done for his soul; if you can see no beginning to his religion, no one gracious mark on which you can lay your hand as being wrought by a divine power as an evidence of his heavenly calling, you have no union with him, because your hope and his hope differ. The hope of the hypocrite, which shall perish, be cut off, and brushed away as a spider's web (Job 8:13, 14), or the hope of a Pharisee, which centres in his own righteousness, is not the same as that in the breast of the child of God, which hangs upon Christ, and the work and witness of the Spirit in the heart. There is no union, therefore, or communion between the two, for there is no knitting joint, no cementing band, of one and the same hope. But where there is this uniting tie, should we not seek to strengthen it, and avoid everything which may tend to weaken or impair it?

3. But we must hasten on to the third and last uniting joint and cementing band—"*one baptism.*" This I believe to be the baptism of the Holy Ghost; not indeed to the exclusion of

baptism by water, which is an emblem of it. And my reason for saying it is the higher and spiritual baptism which is intended here, is the apostle's own language elsewhere. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." (1 Cor. 12:13.) But the mere external ordinance of baptism cannot be said to be the cementing band in the same way as the baptism of the Spirit is, for many have been baptized in water who never were baptized by the Holy Ghost, and many have been baptized by the Holy Ghost who were never baptized in water. Baptism by water only incorporates me into the visible church, but baptism by the Holy Ghost incorporates me into the mystical body of Christ himself. The one I believe and practise as an ordinance of Christ; but the other I receive and prize as the greatest blessing the Lord can give. I have not union and communion with every baptized person, for there are many such to whom I would not give the right hand of fellowship; whom I would not receive into my house, nor bid them God speed, lest I be a partaker of their evil deeds (2 John 10, 11); but I desire to have fellowship with all who have been baptized with the Holy Ghost; and some of them I dearly love who do not see with me as regards the outward ordinances.

Take, then, with me a parting view of these three connecting ligaments of the mystical body of Christ; these three cementing bands of the spiritual temple. How, as internal ties knitting joint to joint, they unite into one compact living frame all the members of the mystical body of Christ. I have attempted to direct your minds mainly to these three points—the oneness of the body; the foundation of that oneness in a Triune God; and the uniting bands which knit every member of that body together. May we, then, ever bear in mind that there is but one body, one church, one fold, one spouse, one bride of the Lord the Lamb. "My dove,

my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bare her." (Song 6:9.) Now if we severally, if we individually, are members of the mystical body of Christ, we shall, as the Lord is pleased to favour us with his Spirit and presence, seek to realise our union with Christ; and as we realise this, we shall desire to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We shall sink our petty differences, drop our little jars, and seek to enjoy union and communion with the whole family of God; to love those whom the Lord loves, and to walk in affection with those whom he has redeemed by his precious blood. Whilst time endures and our nature is what it is, family jars and divisions will always subsist; but every child of God should seek to "follow after the things which make for peace;" not merely with those who are bound up together with him in church fellowship, but with the whole family of God. Our union with all who fear God and believe in the Son of his love we should value beyond all other ties, as enduring when every other relationship fails. As far, then, as heaven is beyond earth, eternity beyond time, and the love of Christ beyond all earthly affection, so should we seek to maintain by all the means in our power union and communion with the people of God. This, however, it is impossible to do without great self-denial and much self-sacrifice; but we shall, sooner or later, reap in our own bosoms the blessed fruit; for as a spirit of strife destroys all inward peace, so a spirit of love brings peace with God, peace with the brethren, and peace in our own conscience.