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"CHRISTIAN UNITY"

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

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CHRISTIAN UNITY

Jesus spent the evening before His crucifixion in the company of His disciples. During that evening He engaged in prayer for them and the central petition of His prayer was that they should all be one and He included not only His disciples but all who would believe in Jesus because of their witness. His words were "that they may all be one even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may also be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." It is interesting to note the sort of unity Jesus prayed for. It was spiritual unity, a unity of person with person through the unity of each person with God. He compared the unity He asked for with the unity in the Trinity Itself. His words are "as You, Father, are in Me and I in You that they may all be one" and the mode of this unity was that each Christian should be in God - "that they may be in Us" - and it is this relationship of each Christian to God and to each other that brings about the world's conversion, "that they may be in Us", that the world may believe."

This prayer of Jesus was answered on the day of Pentecost when God's Spirit was given to the disciples and to all who believed in Jesus through their word. The Spirit of God unites Christians into a unity. The Spirit of God indwells each Christian heart. God is in them and they are in God, just as Jesus had prayed. No more real unity can be imagined. This unity has already been given to us and can never be dissolved, but we ought to give expression to it by our relationship to each other. The New Testament is full of exhortation to practise the virtues which unite people, such as forgiveness, humble-mindedness, thankfulness, and forbearance. If we have these attitudes they preserve the unity and God's Spirit unites us with each other. We should cultivate and practice these virtues of a forgiving spirit, gentleness, meekness, forbearance, thankfulness to others and so give expression to the unity of the Spirit which we have been given on the day of Pentecost.

It is a mistake to think that the Christian unity for which Jesus prayed finds its expression in the uniting of denominations. Denominations are not churches, but are service structures to assist congregations which are real churches, but we sometimes get confused because we call the denomination a church but it is really a service structure and is no more a church in the New Testament sense than a building is a church though it is to the building that the name church is most commonly given. A church building is also a service structure serving the congregation by keeping the rain off their heads and providing a particular room where the church can meet - that is all a church building is - and it is not really a church, though it has this name but it is the congregation that is the church. So too a denomination is no more a church than is a church building a church, though it too has the name of church. But we must not get confused. By amalgamating denominations, We may strengthen the service structure, if the amalgamation is well based and this would be a good thing. But such unions of denominations have no relationship to the unity about which our Lord prayed. That unity is a relationship of persons to God and to one another through the spirit, and is modelled on the unity within the Trinity and is brought about by deepening our relationship to God and so our relationship to one another. Jesus prayer "that they may all be one as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may also be in Us." This is the unity very closely knit with God Himself in the Trinity through His Holy Spirit in the hearts of every believer.

This true Christian unity of personal relationship is the factor which moves the world to believe in the power of the Christian gospel. This is a wonderful experience and we ought to pray that we may grow deeper in it, as we sit together at the feet of Christ, hearing His word. This is the unity we should give ourselves to promoting for it glorifies God as it reflects his character. And each one of us can be fully engaged by seeking God's help to relate ourselves to one another by reflecting the character of Christ by forgiving one another, forbearing, loving one another and growing closer to God in our spirits.

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