

WCCC 1994

Brother Stephen Kaung
The Unity of the Saints (2)

John 17: 9 – 23.

Prayer:

Our Lord, your word is Spirit and life. We look unto you that through your Spirit, your word of life will be planted in each one of us so we can keep your word. Open the door to our hearts and give us a discerning spirit so we can follow you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Oneness is our Prayer and Desire

This time we are going to look at the subject of the oneness of the saints before the Lord. This was one of the focal points of our Lord Jesus' burden in His prayer in John 17. He not only prayed for the eleven disciples by His side, but He also prayed for those who believed in Him because of the words of His disciples. In another word, the prayer here was for the whole church; for you, for me, and all the brothers and sisters gathered here. And because of this reason, may the prayer of our Lord touch the heart of every one of us. This is His desire and also His confidence. May this prayer also become our desire and faith.

We have already mentioned that we need to go back to the source if we want to understand the oneness of the saints. The difficulty today is that the children of God want to solve the problem of the oneness of the saints outside of the source. Even though the intention is good, yet the result always backfires. Thus, we need to go back to the source. We need to find the principle of the oneness of the Godhead which is the source. The oneness of the saints has to be according to the oneness of the Godhead. Only this kind of oneness is the real oneness. And this is also the oneness that our Lord prayed for. Outside of this oneness, all other oneness are substitutes and counterfeits. Those are the ones that God renounces and we should renounce them too.

Now we are going to fellowship on how to achieve the oneness that is according to the oneness of the Godhead.

The Necessity of the Oneness of the Saints

The oneness of the saints is a very important matter. Why is it so important?

God Wants the Manifestation of a Corporate Body.

Our Lord wants us to be like Him in all things. Romans 8: 29 tells us that the will of God is to conform us to the image of His Son. All those whom God has predestined, He called. He chose us to be conformed to the image of His Son so that His Son should be the firstborn among many brothers. When we read this verse, we mostly apply it to an individual - I have been chosen, and God is going to conform me to the image of His Son. Of course, this is accurate, but it is not complete. God's will is to conform a corporate body to the image of His Son. Our Lord is so glorious, abundant, and perfect that a few individuals are not enough to manifest Him. It needs an entire body to be able to manifest the fullness of the head. Our Lord is our head. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. All the chosen are His body and we are just one of the members of the body. It is impossible for just one member to completely manifest His fullness. Thus, the bible said, the Church is the body of Christ, the fulness of Him who fills all and in all. And because of this, we see that this matter of conforming to the image of His Son involves the entire church. We are all being conformed to the image of His Son so that the head and the body can be the same.

At the same time, we see that the church is the bride of Christ. After God created Adam, He said, it is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helpmate, his like. We know that 'his like' means 'his counterpart'. It means to be completely like him. It has to be completely like him to be able to help him. We know that the church is the bride of Christ. The church has to grow into maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It is not just one or a few Christians who grow up to the stature of Christ. But it has to be for all the children of God, that is the entire body grows up to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We need to remember that God's will is for us to be like Him. This likeness means we have to be completely like Him in His nature. The nature of the Godhead is oneness. So He wants the nature of oneness in us - the body. You cannot imagine there is no oneness in the head because the oneness in the Godhead is perfect. Then how is it possible that there is no oneness in the body? If the nature of the head is oneness - Father, Son and Holy Spirit are completely one - then the children in the body have to be one too. And this is what God asks of us - to be like Him.

That God Will Get the Glory

The oneness of the saints is that God gets the glory. In John 17, our Lord prayed that I can be glorified because of them. Please remember: the nature of sin is division; the essence of the saving grace is oneness. Where there is sin, there is division. Once Adam and Eve fell into sin, not only were they separated from God, but immediately there was a division between them. Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because he loved Eve more than he loved God. But after he sinned, he put the responsibility of sinning onto Eve. And immediately you see the division between Adam and Eve. And where there is division, there is a shame. In contrast, where there is oneness, there is glory. Thus the oneness of the saints is a matter that greatly glorifies God. It is the result of the salvation of the Lord. In His salvation, He took away all our nature of division on the cross, so we can be one in Him. And this is a glorious truth.

It is the Testimony of the Oneness of the Father, the Son and the Spirit

Why is the oneness of the saints so important? It is because the oneness of the saints is a testimony. The Lord said, so that they will be one as we are one. And because of this, the people

in this world will know that you sent me. Brothers and sisters, you do not see oneness in this world. You can only see division everywhere because this is the phenomenon of the flesh. From Galatians 5: 19 – 21, you can clearly see that the behavior of the flesh consists of jealousy, contentions, disputes and differences of opinions. So you can see that wherever the flesh is, there is division. The flesh is everywhere on earth with the result that there is division everywhere.

But today, God did an amazing thing on this earth. He saved these people who originally were divisive so that we can become one. This is something that has not happened on this earth before. When the world sees a group of people who can be one, they cannot but admit that God did indeed send His Son to this earth. And the power of this testimony is indeed great. And that was why the testimony of the church at the beginning had so much power. It is because when unsaved people see this group, they will say, see how they love one another and they are really in unison as one. And they cannot help but bow down their heads and worship God.

To Show God's Love

The oneness of God's children is to show God's love. The Lord said, they are one, not only that the world may believe that you have sent me, but also that they know that you have loved them as you have loved me. So we see that the oneness of the saints is a mark that God loves us. His love encourages us. His love fills our hearts. So that we not only love the God that we cannot see but also love the brothers and sisters that we can see. And whenever brothers and sisters love one another and in unison, it shows that it is the love of God that enables us to do so and not that we can do it on our own. So the oneness of the saints is a very important matter.

The Condition of the Church

But let us look at the condition of the church in the first century. In I Corinthians, we see that they had all sorts of problems. (They also wrote Paul to ask him some questions). But when Paul responded to their letter, there was only one thing that burdened him most in his heart. He said, for it has been shown to be concerning you, that there are strifes among you. Some said I am of Paul, some I am of Apollos, some I am of Cephas and some I am especially of Christ. (I am the only one of Christ, you all are of Paul, Apollos and Cephas). Paul said, is Christ divided? Even though the church at Corinth had not reached the level of complete division to become the church of Paul, the church of Apollos, the church of Cephas or even the church of Christ, yet the cracks were already there. And if the cracks were not mended, then it will progress to a split. When we come to Corinthians 11, Paul said, for inevitably there will be factions among you, that the approved may become manifest among you. The Chinese translation is 'that the experienced may become manifest among you'. But in the original, it is 'approved' rather than 'experienced'. Indeed, the brothers and sisters in the church of Corinth were of the flesh and thus it could not help but had division among them. But these things could lead to the approval being manifested. Who were the ones that the Lord approved? Those were the ones who maintained the oneness of the saint.

Acts 15 mentioned that in Jerusalem a conference was held for the purpose of resolving the problem with the Gentiles who believed in the Lord. And the question was that after they believed in the Lord, should they be circumcised and should they keep the law of Moses? We thank God that the result of that conference was that the Gentiles did not need to do either one. Even though

that question was answered, yet the same problem was not resolved because the Bible recorded that wherever Paul went, that group of Jews followed him and stirred up trouble for him.

An example was the church in Philippi. We know that the church at Philippi was a model church. The church was full of love. And they had worked together with Paul in one heart and mind to promote the gospel from the very beginning. But two leading sisters among them had spiritual gifts. They had helped Paul preach the gospel. But there were jealousy and strifes between these two. And as a result, the church of Philippi lost their joy in the Lord.

There was also a similar matter in Book of III John. We know at that time it was towards the end of the first century. John said there was one by the name of Diotrephes who loved to be the first among others. He not only received not the children and servants of God, but he also forbade the brothers and sisters there to receive them. He also drove out from the church those who received them. So we see that there was already problems of division in the church in the first century. Of course, these matters of division became worse and worse. And later on we know that Christianity is divided into three main sects: Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and the Reformists. And within each sect, there were further divisions. Thus looking at the church outwardly we can say the church is in decline and is corrupted.

Altered Oneness

Uniformity

Is it that the children of God do not know that we should be in unity? The children of God know that oneness is the will of God. Today, if I tell you that division is the will of God, I think all of you will say that I am a false prophet. This is because inside every brother and sister, there is a deep feeling that we are one. In every age and especially in this age, most of the children of God feel that we should not be divided but we should be one. Thus, the Catholics came out and said, we should be one; you all should join with us because we are the traditional one. In another word, their oneness is to unite together. We all need to be under them because they are Catholic. Brothers and sisters, do you think that is oneness if they demand that we should all be under them?

Ecumenical Movement

I do not know whether brothers and sisters have heard of the term 'ecumenical movement' in this age. We all need to be together. It does matter whether you are Presbyterian, Baptist, Assemblies of God or Methodist, we should come together. Not only did it happen with the Reformists, but also happened with the Reformists and the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox with Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox with the Reformists. There are so many conferences in the world. The theologians and the leaders of the religious world all come together for conferences. There are such great differences among us. Let us come together and see whether each of us can give up something and compromise. Hopefully, we can make it together. From the appearance, this looks like uniformity. But until today, even this outward level of uniformity has not been achieved.

This is also a very dangerous thing. This is what the enemy wants to do in the end times. The enemy wants to take all the different religions and make it into one religion. The people in the ecumenical movement also have had contact with Buddhism, Islam and all other religions. And

they hope one day it will become a unification of all the religions. This is what is mentioned in the Book of Revelation - Mystery, Babylon the Great. John saw a harlot with a wine cup filled with the blood of the saints and of those martyrs who testified for Jesus. Is this oneness?

Cooperation

Uniformity is not oneness. Union also is not oneness. Since we cannot unify, let us cooperate with each other. If there is a certain project that we need to do, then let us cooperate and this will show that we are united together. For example, if there is a big gospel meeting, let us invite the Catholics, the Reformists, and the churches of different religions and different groups to come. And for the sake of uniformity, let us work together in this gospel meeting. Is not this unification? Yes, for the period of time that we all work together, it seems like there is some unification. We can all pray together, fellowship together and work together. But when the work is done, you go your way and I go my way. Even the results from the gospel meeting were divided among the Catholics, the Reformists and others. This again is division. I am not saying that it is not right to work together. Thank the Lord that this working together in an agreement can glorify God. But my point is: is this working together with a oneness?

I have heard of a famous convention called Keswick Convention. (I have never attended it. I am not criticizing it. I just want to give you an example.) The convention is held every year in the second week of July in Keswick town in England. The convention centers on messages about overcoming and deeper life. And in the past years, God did use this convention. It is said that they erected a very big tabernacle because Christians from all over the world come to this convention. And behind the podium, there is a banner that says 'All one in Christ'. Inside the tabernacle, they all worship the Lord. They all sing, pray and pursue the life of the Lord. This is such a glorious and happy matter. But outside the tabernacle on the street, there are many booths selling books. And these booths belong to different religious organizations – Baptist, Presbyterian and others. Each religious organization has their own books as if to say that their own organization has the truth. Brothers and sisters, is this oneness? Is this the oneness that our Lord wants?

The Source of Oneness

Oneness does not come from organizing. Francis Xavier once said: that real oneness is not the cooperation between members within a body. The complete matching between two members within a body is not just one member telling the other that let us cooperate together. Rather it is all the members in the body that submit to the order of the head. All the members are under the authority of the head. Only when they do that then can they be totally one and totally matched.

Today, what is our problem? Today when we have division, what we do is that we say, come and let us negotiate and then cooperate. You can see that this way is just on the outside. It is just from men and is organized. This is not oneness. Oneness is three-dimensional. Each of us is one with the Lord; and in the oneness in the Lord, we will be one. Thus, anything that is organized, that is from men and only on the outside, that is uniform, that is a federation and that is temporary cooperation is not the oneness that the Lord prayed in His prayer.

The Oneness that the Lord Prayed For

The Oneness in the Godhead

What is the oneness that the Lord prayed for? The oneness of the saints is according to the oneness in the Godhead. We see that the oneness in the Godhead is not from men, is not just the outward things, is not a federation and is not temporary. We see that the oneness in the Godhead is totally within: the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father and the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit all in one Spirit. This is entirely from within. Thus the oneness of the saints has to be entirely from within. All that are from without, all that are from men, all that are organized and all that are horizontal are not oneness. The oneness of the saints has to start from within.

Thank the Lord! I Corinthians 1: 30 tells us, *'But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who has been made to us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and holiness, and redemption.* When we believe in the Lord, God not only gives us His life, He also put us in Christ. Brothers and sisters, remember that we who believe in the Lord, we believe 'into' Christ. Whoever believes in the Lord, because of their faith, God put all of us into Christ. We all are in God; and He changed us into a new creation. II Corinthians 5: 17 tells us, *'So if anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new: and all things are of the God'.* Dear brothers and sisters, we thank and praise God! You do not know what a great thing God has done on us when we believed in the Lord. He took away all our old things and abolished them on the cross. He changed us into a new creation; the old things passed away; all things are new and all things are of God.

Oneness in Christ

The division is of the old creation. In Christ, the division has already been done away. The cross has abolished all different kinds of division. Today, we stand on the ground of the new creation. Today we are in Christ. Thus, you can see that we are one; you are in Christ, I am also in Christ. The 'you' in Christ is a new creation. The 'I' in Christ is also a new creation. And there is this oneness in Christ in this new creation. Oneness is only possible in Christ. Apart from Christ, there is only division.

Why is it that we, the children of God and already in Christ, are still divisive? It is because when we are divisive, we returned to the old creation. And of course, it is not surprising that there is division in the old creation because it is natural there is division in the old creation. Today we are all standing in Christ; we are all living in Christ; and because Christ cannot be divided, so division is not possible. Wherever you see division, you know that man has fallen back into the old creation and is not standing in Christ. I think this is what John Darby said, there is a center in oneness and that center is God. Only in God is oneness possible. If it is not in that center, no matter how you try, it is not oneness.

Everyone Lets the Lord Live – the Perfect Oneness

Thus the Lord said to us, *'That they may be all one, as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us'* (John 17: 21). The secret of oneness is 'that they may be in us'.

Not only this, John 17: 22 – 23 said, *‘And the glory which thou have given me I have given them, that they maybe one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one’*. Verse 21 mentioned that *‘they also may be one in us’* – this is the secret of oneness. And verse 23 said, *‘I in them, that they may be perfected into one’*. In here you see there is a progression: we will be one if we are in God; and the Lord in us, and our oneness will be totally perfect. This is our position – we are in God. And this is our experience – the Lord is in us. In another word, it is not only because we are in God and so in position, we are in one, but also we are one also in experience. It is because the Lord dwells in us and He is our life. I (old creation) have already been nailed to the cross with Christ; I (new creation) no longer live, but Christ lives in me. I now live by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself for me. Today Christ lives in me. It is the Lord who lives in me. It is the Lord living in you and living in me. If we all let the Lord live, then this oneness is perfect. Our problem is this: even though Christ is in us, we do not let him live; we fight to live by ourselves. The result is that we are all divided and split up. Thus you need to see that oneness is a story of life. What is life? Man has no life. You are not life; I am not life; only Christ is life. If we let Christ live in us, then the oneness will be perfect.

Oneness is the Work of the Holy Spirit

Not only oneness have to be in life, but we also know that oneness is the work of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4: 3 told us to *use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace*. This unity of the Spirit has already been given to us. Each one of us, being the child of God, has this unity of the Spirit in us. What is the unity of the Spirit? The unity of the Spirit is the unity of the Godhead. Ephesians 4: 4 told us, *there is one body and one Spirit, as you have been also called in one hope of your calling*. Here we see that there are three ones: the body is one, the Spirit is one and the hope of calling is one. The three ones here are related to the Holy Spirit. Whether we are Jews or Greeks, we are all in one Holy Spirit and baptized into one body. It is the Holy Spirit who baptized us all into one body. Did the Holy Spirit carry out this work? The Holy Spirit already accomplished this work on the day of Pentecost. One hundred and twenty individual members of the body, every single one a very good Christian, were baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit. It was not just one hundred and twenty parishioners, but it is one hundred and twenty members in a body. In one day, three thousand believed in the Lord. And these three thousand also were baptized into the body. In these two thousand years in church history, all over the world in every place, no matter where it is, the Holy Spirit not only rebirth those who believed in the Lord but also baptized them into the body. Today you are in the body of Christ because the Holy Spirit baptized you into the body. If not, how can you be in the body? This is very easy to prove. Once a person believes in the Lord, there is be two consciousness in him:

A Born-Again Person Will Have Two Consciousness in Him

A Consciousness of God

First, he will have a consciousness of God. God is no longer a faraway, abstract God. The Holy Spirit together with your spirit confirms that you are the child of God. You can call Him, Abba, Father. This is a consciousness that you have once you believed in the Lord. If you do not have this feeling when you believe in the Lord, then your belief is not real. You have not been

reborned by the Holy Spirit. If you have the new life, then you definitely will know the Father God.

A Consciousness of Other Saints

Simultaneously, after you believed in the Lord and you meet another believer, immediately you will feel that there is a unity between the two of you. You have not met him before. It is the first time you meet him. But even during the first time the two of you meet, you will say, my brother, my sister. And immediately there is a consciousness in you that both of you are in a body. Brothers and sisters, this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our Hope

We not only have one body, one Holy Spirit, but also one hope. What is our hope? Our hope is that one day, this body will grow into maturity, to the full stature of Christ and the Lord will come back and receive us as His bride. This is our hope. There is no other hope that is more glorious than this hope! Our hope is not to walk on streets of gold. I am afraid that streets of gold will feel very hard when we walk on it. Our hope is to be the bride of Christ together. This is the hope that the Holy Spirit gives within us. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is to lead us towards this goal. Thus you see the three oneness are in the Holy Spirit.

Be Diligent to Maintain the Oneness Given by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 4:5 said: *One Lord, one faith, one baptism.* All these three 'ones' are related to the Lord. The Son of God is our Lord. We only have one Lord. We only have one faith; we only believe in Him. We only have one baptism. We are baptized into Christ. We belong to Him. That is why we are one in the Son. This is what we all have. You have it if you believe in the Lord.

Lastly, verse 6 said: *One God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all and in us all.* We are also one in our Father God. Your God is my God. Your Father is my Father. We only have one Father. We only have one God. In this Father God, we are all one.

These seven 'ones' is the oneness given by the Holy Spirit. This has already been given to us. We all have this already. Now we have to be diligent in maintaining it. We are not to lose it under whatever circumstances because it has been given to us by the Holy Spirit.

The Oneness is in the Purpose of God

The oneness in the Godhead is not only in the inside, not only in essence, not only in life and fellowship but also is in the purpose of God. Thus, today our oneness is wholly according to the oneness in the Godhead. It is an inward story. It is the same in essence. It is the fellowship of the inward life. And simultaneously, we are one in the purpose of God. Today, if the children of God were not able to see the purpose of God, then they can never manifest this oneness. That is why Proverbs 29: 18 says: *Without vision, the people cast off restraint.*

What is the vision? Vision is being able to see the eternal purpose of God. Today we have lowered the standard of vision too much. The vision here means to be able to see the purpose deep in the heart of God. If we can see this purpose, then we can be one. If we cannot see this purpose, then we disintegrate. The problem today is that: I said I have a vision and my vision is this. He also said he has a vision and his vision is that. My vision is preaching the gospel; your vision is exercising gifts; his vision is teaching the children of God. There are also visions as operating hospitals and orphanages and others. Each of us has our own vision. Visions dominate our life and our relationship. So, if your vision is different from the others, you cannot be of the same heart as others and each of us will go our own way.

Today the children of God cannot be one because our vision is not the same. Their heart is good but their vision is different. They all lack what Paul said 'the vision that comes from heaven'. The heavenly vision is the one that has to do with the eternal purpose of God. The eternal purpose of God is to have His Son has the pre-eminence in all things and all things in heaven and all things on earth to be one in Christ. And we are the bride that God gives to His Son. This is the vision. This is the purpose. Only in this purpose, can we be one, because the triune God is one in that purpose.

Prayer:

Our Lord, please put deep in our heart a consciousness that if the oneness is not from you, it is not oneness at all. Open the eyes of our hearts so that not only do we see your oneness but also the oneness that you have given us. Make us be diligent to maintain this oneness so we can manifest this oneness. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.