

God's People Are One

Some truths are so firmly established in the Bible, universally held by the people of God down through the centuries, that they constitute a body of truth which we call the analogy of faith. These truths provide a wonderful safeguard against unsound and careless Bible interpretation. When a proposed theory with tenuous Bible support is brought forth from whatever segment of theology and it runs afoul of truth already established, then it must be judged as erroneous. That which bears no analogy to known truth cannot be true.

Not everything, of course, has yielded to a Christian consensus. There are widely divergent views, for example, on the nature of the church, the ordinances, the place of law and grace in the New Covenant, and especially eschatology. But it seems to me that no small amount of disagreement in these areas could be put to rest by sober consideration of fixed truth in other areas.

One of the most unassailable truths in the Word of God is the absolute oneness, the utter indivisibility of the people of God. If this lacks some prominence in Christian consensus through theological debate, it more than makes it up in the sheer weight given it in the Bible. There are more than a score of Biblical facts that lay the foundation for, undergird, and assert this blessed truth. Consider:

Oneness in Creation

God made *"of one blood all nations (ethnos here certainly includes Jews as well as Gentiles) for to dwell on all the face of the earth . . ."* (Acts 17:26). The woman, made subsequent to the man, was not a separate creation, but derived from the same individual, so that Adam said of her, "This is me, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Our Lord appeals the indissolubility of the man and woman's union to the "twain being one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). Adam is one man in two parts, male and female, and as lock and key make one complete mechanism, each part of which is incomplete without the other, so man and woman together constitute one man.

Oneness in the Fall

The one man, whom God made in His image from among His creation, rebelled and fell from that glorious state. When he fell, all his posterity fell with him, since his offspring were nothing more or less than he. We were all in Adam, proceed from Adam, therefore are yet one in Adam. All the sin, guilt and condemnation our first father brought upon himself, he brought also upon the whole race (Romans 5:12). Death has passed to all men because of their indivisible oneness through Adam. We are all together condemned in Adam. No part may be condemned without the whole.

Oneness in Abraham

Abraham and his seed are another example of the oneness of God's people. What shall we say of this one man whom God called out of all the fallen posterity of Adam? Physical, natural Adam (including Abraham) was condemned to death. All Adam's children sinned as one man, and all die as one man. But for God's eternal covenant of mercy, the human race would be ended. In Abraham He begins to reveal the principles and terms of that covenant. He calls Abraham to be a *"father of many nations"* (Genesis 17:4). These many nations are to be blessed in what Paul calls *"one seed which is Christ"* (Galatians 3:26). God establishes here a "spiritual people", a people who become *"the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:16). These "children of faithful Abraham" are a new race of people in the last Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:45). The human line through which this promised federal Head shall come is explicitly named, one man at a time, demonstrating that it is not of human order, merit or works, but of God's sovereign grace. Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; Judah, not Reuben. The singularity and oneness of Abraham's seed converges into one Man, Jesus Christ. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:28-29). The organic oneness in Adam has given way to the spiritual oneness in Christ.

Oneness in Jacob/Israel

Jacob fled from the angry face of his brother alone. When he returned, he left not one hoof behind that belonged to him. His wives, sons, daughters, servants, and all his livestock came with him. He left alone and returned many, yet the many were all Jacob.

When he went down into Egypt, the whole family, seventy souls in all, went with him. Joseph is excepted since he, as a type of Christ, went before to be the saviour and deliverer. When Israel came out of Egypt, the whole company came out as one man in one day, *"for all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 12:41). Think of that! Not one Hebrew child breathed one breath of free air until the day they all went free. The reason is purely soteriological. Only the passover lamb, as the death of the firstborn, could avail to deliver them from the iron furnace. When that death had accomplished its intended purpose, all whom God intended to deliver went free as one. Nobody got out early for good behaviour or was detained late for bad behaviour. Deliverance is not of human behaviour. It is of the Lord's mercies.

Israel is contemplated as God's son in the singular: *"Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me"* (Exodus 4:22-23). Nowhere in the Bible is the richness of this implication more profound than in Hosea 11:1. *"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."* A superficial reading of this might dismiss the verse as no more than an historical statement of the Exodus. But we are told in Matthew 2:15 that Joseph took the child Jesus down into Egypt *"that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.'"* The Egyptian sojourn and Exodus were to serve as a type of the bondage and deliverance of all the people of God. It is God's elect son, the mystical

body of Christ, that is held in the grip of Satanic powers. And God calls His church out as one man in His only begotten Son, Christ Jesus.

Before we get too far away from Egypt, let us drop back to the night of the Passover. There was to be only one lamb per family (Exodus 12:3-4) and the whole family was to be represented by the blood of that one lamb. None were to be delivered unless the whole were to be delivered. And the whole family ate of the one lamb together in *one* house (Exodus 12:46). Not one piece of flesh was to be taken out of that one house, and not a bone of the lamb was to be broken. The lamb, of course, speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ Who died for the whole family of God. The one house also represents the one safe refuge in Christ, where the blood is applied. All the family is redeemed and kept together . . . never separated.

The whole congregation of Israel killed the lamb (Exodus 12:6). The whole of God's people, by their sins, occasioned the death of the Saviour. It was for our sins He died. And we, together, with one punitive stroke, put Him to death in our stead. All for whom the lamb died on the Passover night went free in the morning.

In all the wilderness journey, the people considered themselves one, each person an indivisible part of the whole. They all camped together and moved together. When some of the people murmured or complained, God dealt with the whole multitude. At Kadesh-Barnea, when Caleb and Joshua would have gone on into the land, and the people refused, no one went in. When they finally did enter the land of Canaan, the whole congregation crossed Jordan together (Joshua 3:17). There were no first, second or third crossings. They all went into the land at the same time.

The children of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, who had taken their possession on the east bank of Jordan, crossed over with the whole multitude as they had been instructed of Moses (Joshua 4:12). The conquest of the land was by Israel, not just a part, but the whole. All the men of war were engaged in the battle all the way. Failure set in when this rule was broken at Ai, and again when they failed to drive out all the enemy, by leaving each tribe to fight its battles alone.

The matter of Achan is an unmistakable illustration of how seriously God takes this oneness. When one man sinned and partook of the "accursed thing", God said, "Israel hath sinned" (Joshua 7:11), and He would not help them any more until that sin had been judged.

The real corruption of the whole through individual trespass is one of the main reasons given for capital punishment for whoredom (Deuteronomy 22:21) and sabbath-breaking (Numbers 30-36). Even the land is said to be polluted by the trespass of one party (Jeremiah 3:1). The Israelites had learned this lesson well when the children of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh built an altar on the east side of Jordan. All Israel was mobilized for war to stamp out this horrible trespass before God judged the whole nation. "*But that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord? And it will be, seeing ye rebel today against the Lord, that tomorrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel*" (Joshua 22:10-18).

Israel reached the peak of its power and glory as *one* under the reign of David. Its *division* under Rehoboam and Jeroboam marked the beginning of its decline, defeat, dispersal and final rejection as the people of God. Henceforth, the biblical emphasis is on spiritual Israel, the children of Abraham through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:29; Romans 2:28-29).

Oneness of Christ With His People

Hebrews 2:11 tells us of the oneness of Christ with His people: "*For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of One: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren*", and also, "*Behold I and the children which God hath given Me*" (Hebrews 2:13). The people of God can no more be divided than Christ can be divided (1 Corinthians 1:13). This oneness is declared to be of the same unity as the Holy Trinity. In our Lord's *effectual* intercessory prayer, we find Him saying: "*That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one is Us . . . 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 17:21-22). Just as certain as one person has received the grace and glory of God in salvation, so sure is his indivisible oneness with the whole body of Christ.

There is only one Christ, one Redeemer, for both Jew and Gentile. And not one Jew was redeemed before the whole of the church, both Jew and Gentile, was purchased in the death of our Lord. The sins of all the believing Jews were rolled forward from one annual Day of Atonement to another until the promised Lamb of God appeared. He then, in His sacrificial death, gathered up all the sins of all the elect, both past and future, and put them all under His blood, purchasing for Himself both a bride and a mystical body, the church, "*the fulness of Him that filleth all in all*" (Ephesians 1:22-23). Therefore *all* Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26). They must be, for they cannot be lost, since He redeemed them all at the same time; true Israel which is of Abraham's natural seed, and those who are children of Abraham by faith in Christ Jesus. They are all made one together by their common redemption in Christ.

Our Lord declared this when He said, "*I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd*" (John 10:15-16). When the Great Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep, the whole creation shook, boulders split, the sun hid its face, and the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). This not only gave immediate access for the redeemed to the Holy of Holies (those Jews in the Holy Place now had no better access than Gentiles in the Court of the Gentiles), but tore down forever the barrier between Jew and Gentile. To this the Apostle testifies: "*For He is our peace who hath made both one (Jew and Gentile), and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby*" (Ephesians 2:14-16). What a profound statement of the people of God who are "*builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*" (Ephesians 2:22)! How dare we even think about a doctrine that violates such divine oneness!

The unbroken oneness of God's people secured in the Atonement again is prefigured in the passover lamb: "*In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof*" (Exodus

12:43). This figure was kept intact when our Lord's early death on the cross preempted the soldiers' practice of breaking the victims' legs so they would suffocate. They did not break His legs as they did the thieves (John 20:33-36). The Spirit, through David, prophesies of the Lord's preserving all His people in oneness, "*He keepeth all His bones: not one of them is broken*" (Psalm 34:20).

Oneness of the people of God is made necessary by virtue of our joint heirship with Jesus Christ. A regular inheritance may be divided to the separate heirs and each go his own way. But not so in a joint inheritance. In this the heirs all hold an *undivided* interest in the whole estate. To be separated in any sense from the whole body of heirs is to lose all inheritance. We inherit in perpetual union with Christ and with all that are Christ's. Notice the *with* and the *together* of Romans 8:17. "*And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.*" All of the redeemed, Jew and Gentile alike, have God for our Father, Christ for our Saviour, the Holy Spirit for our Comforter, and share alike in the eternal inheritance.

The Bible carries this oneness of the people of God all the way through to their being brought out of this world into that eternal inheritance. In this I can do no better than to quote A. W. Pink:

Fifth, the resurrection of the body. In this the whole family of faith shall share alike, and at the same time: 'In Christ shall all be made alive; but every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming' (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). And who are "Christ's?" Why, all that the Father gave to Him, all that He purchased with His blood. God's Word knows nothing of His people being raised in sections, at intervals. Sixth, the re-union between the soul and body, which takes place at Christ's appearing. In Hebrews 12:23, the Old Testament saints are referred to as "the spirits of just men made perfect," but they are still "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body" (Romans 8:23). In this, too, all the redeemed shall share alike, being "caught up together to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Seventh, the entrance into eternal glory, when Old and New Testament saints alike shall, all together, be "forever with the Lord" . . . Then shall be fulfilled that mystical word, "I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11) . . . Then it shall be that Christ will "gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad" (John 11:52) . . . not only among all nations, but through all dispensation."

Unity, Diversity and Division

This oneness is not sameness. As division of a body would be mutilation, so sameness would be monstrosity. "*So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and ever one members one of another. Having then gifts differing . . .*" (Romans 12:5-6). The one body of God's people, called the body of Christ, contains infinite diversity of gifts, but by the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4); of ministries, but the same Lord (verse 5); of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all (verse 6).

There could be no wholeness without this diversity. One may hear melody from a single musical instrument, but it takes diversity to produce harmony, richness and fullness of beauty.

This diversity makes possible the wonderful unity that is in the body of Christ. Each member is a distinct creation in himself. There is none like him, none with which he can compare himself. It would be like comparing apples and oranges. (Which is better, yellow or red?) He has no one with which to compete, none to envy, none to put him to shame, no one to exult over, only other different people, all of whom he needs and draws benefit from. "*God hath tempered (alloyed) the body together*" (1 Corinthians 12:24). He has taken a vast multitude of different elements, all of which have little or no value in themselves alone, and alloyed them together to make one body of infinite worth. That is the one body of God's people as taught in the Scriptures and revealed in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Now, it seems to me, that some serious meditation on this oneness of God's people would be a death-blow to some superficial divisions among Christian brethren. I say "superficial", not because the divisions are shallow and of little matter in people's minds. Indeed, they are not. On the contrary, they are sometimes so deep-seated and large, that they fill minds to the crowding out of essential gospel truth, and some even militate against the gospel. They are superficial in the sense that they are lies, false issues, and they create "divisions" that are illusions (however effective and consequential they may seem at this present time) which cannot exist, and must ultimately evaporate into nothingness at the appearing of our glorious God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let us take, for example, the nature of the church. From the foregoing, it is quite clear that the whole body of the redeemed, the elect who are in union with Jesus Christ by repentance and faith, constitute the church. None outside this salvation are the church, and all in possession of this blessing are in that one body of Christ. Whence, then, all this controversy about a regenerate membership or even a regenerate eldership? The Bible has settled that for all who believe it. When, then, of those who claim to be the only *true* church? The Roman Catholics claim the title by apostolic succession. Landmark Baptists claim it by ecclesiastical succession. The Anglicans claim it by royal orders. Campbellites claim it by virtue of what they have named themselves. And a host of come-out, unorganized organizations claim it because they have no name. Most of these will admit that there are Christians outside their communion, but nevertheless refuse communion with them. Some insist others have no baptism, since they, as the true church, are the only ones with the right to baptize. Others, on the same premise, refuse to allow any to participate at the Lord's Table who are not under their peculiar discipline.

Landmark Baptists claim that only they will be the Bride of Christ, all other Christians being simply guests at the wedding. Conditional Primitive Baptists hold, along with a few other sects, that only those who choose to live holy enough will be able to enter the Holy City, other less sanctified believers being left outside the gates.

Men have raised other eschatological walls in the households of Christ. Split rapturists have "Spirit-filled" Christians going to heaven when the Lord takes the "first bunch" before the tribulation, while "carnal Christians" must wait on purification during the tribulation. Other systems separate "Old Testament saints", "church-age saints", "tribulation saints", "millennium saints", in a

succession of resurrections and harvests with intervening time periods. Some eternally separate Jews who “shall inherit the earth”, and saved Gentiles “who will dwell in heaven”.

Some of these claims have absolutely no Scriptural basis, and exist only in the perverted logic of carnal minds. Others can produce an impressive body of proof texts to support their theories. But in order for these proof texts to be valid, we must destroy a formidable doctrine: the oneness of God’s believing elect. We must deny that they all have one common Saviour, and that He purchased them all with one price at one time. We must deny the immutability of God Who has always moved all His people at one time, and claim that He has changed and begun to move them in sections and intervals. We must divide the single, unbroken Body of Christ. We must deny the joint heirship of all that are Christ’s with Him, separate the heirs from the firstborn, and give each a distinct inheritance which he himself has merited and which sets him apart from other Christians.

All of this bears no resemblance to the faith “once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and, I think, must be abandoned. At Christ’s coming all these divisions will disappear as if they never existed, and be remembered no more. We could greatly enhance our communion, our joy and our witness if we forsook them now.

- C. M.