

Be Ye All of One Mind

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Now though this is the Sunday, which is by the ritualistic churches called Palm Sunday, I see no reason whatever for changing the steady progress of our, to me very enjoyable, trip through 1 Peter. So in 3rd of Peter, 3rd of 1st Peter, verses 8 and 9, these words. Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrarywise, blessing, knowing that ye are there unto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Now he says here, finally. I never could discover why the Apostles put a finally in, every once in a while, when the preachers have a smiling joke about St. Paul bringing one of his epistles to a close three different times. Finally, brethren, he said three different times, then went on. And Peter says finally brethren and says that we are to be of one mind.

I want to talk a little bit about what it is to be like-minded. And Ellicott, who is the latest, the fine, the great commentator at Zondervan Publishers, has given back to the world again of English people. He says the word means unanimous. So, I want to ask you, or ask and answer, what did Peter mean when he said finally be ye all of one mind? Finally, be ye unanimous.

Well, I'll tell you what it isn't to begin with in order that we might discover what it is. Unanimity, spiritual unanimity, is not regulated uniformity. I could never discover, nor do I know to this day, how the churches have fallen into this error of believing that unanimity meant uniformity, that to be like-minded meant the imposition of a similarity from the outside.

Now this has been a great error, and people have tried to secure harmony in religious bodies by imposing uniformity. The very word uniformity, if you take the last syllable or two off, you have uniform. And uniform, while it is a descriptive word describing a certain situation, it's also a very blunt noun referring to a garment or a series of garments worn by members of certain bodies, or groups, to show that they are members of those bodies or groups. We have the uniform of the United States Army, the uniform of the Navy, the Air Corps, and Marines.

We have various uniforms, that is, garments that are formed in one uniform, and it's a uniformity imposed from the outside. But everybody that's ever been in the United States service knows that under the uniformity there is a world of disagreement and grouching and definitely lack of uniformity. So, the putting on of a uniform does not in any sense make a body of persons one. And yet people have tried to achieve it, that uniformity, by putting on a uniform. They've tried to achieve it by all adopting the same tone of voice. For they have tried to adopt it or have adopted it by all reading the same books or doing the same things. That is imposed uniformity, and it is a great error because it assumes that uniformity is an external thing and can be achieved by imposition and forgets that the only valid unity is unity of the heart.

If you could conceive a regiment of soldiers, each one dressed differently, they might look odd, but if you could conceive of a regiment of soldiers that by some miracle had been tuned like several instruments all to one pitch pipe and were all alike inwardly, you'd have then perfect uniformity, and you wouldn't need the uniform on the outside. But I suppose there is no particular harm in all dressing alike if in the first place everybody's thinking alike and feeling alike on certain things. But the error I say, lies in believing that we can achieve inward unity by imposing external uniformity. Now actually, variety and not uniformity is the hallmark of God. Wherever you see God's hand, you see not uniformity or always even similarity, but you see variety.

Paul says that a star differs from another star in glory, and if it would clear up some time, as I hope it may, and the ceiling lift, ceiling is a word we use for all the tobacco smoke and grime and smog that lies over the great cities. But if it would all lift some night and we could all see the starry city of God, you would note that there wasn't one star exactly like another. They differ from each other in glory and God made them. If God had made all the stars in heaven to be the same size and the same distance from the earth so they presented a uniform appearance, it would look when you gazed up like the marquee of a theater and not like that mysterious wonderful heaven of God that you see when the skies are clear.

Everybody knows or can find out in five minutes that no two leaves on any tree are alike. They all differ, they're somewhat alike, they may even be basically alike, but God allows them a certain, so to speak, freedom of choice. Anybody that gazes at a seascape, or better still, gazes at the ocean, will notice that even when the winds are high and the waves are running, they are no two waves alike. If you look carelessly, you'll say they look alike and there's a monotony and uniformity about them as they beat in nervously over the sand. But if you look a little more sharply, you'll find that no two of them are alike and no one is quite like any other one.

And the artist who makes them all alike has imposed something out of his own mind upon God Almighty's ocean, for the ocean is never guilty of stewing up 10,000 little billows, all the same size and shape and all the same angle. Each one differs from the other.

And it's so with the birds. We say we hear a bird; we say that bird is a cardinal and that one I hear singing is a warbler and this one that I hear singing is a robin. But if you listen again and a little more closely, you will find that no two robins sing alike. Everybody that raises canaries knows that there is a basic likeness in certain, say, of the role or type of canary, but they do have different songs.

And it's so with people, that's too well known to need any explanation here; and Bible Saints are the same. We make a great deal of the similarities between Bible Saints, when actually the variety were still more marked in the similarities. Who can conceive of two men further apart than Isaiah and Elijah? Why, if they had been sitting in the same church pew or had been somewhere together, they would not even have been recognized as belonging to the same race, let alone the same faith. Their similarities were internal, they belong together inside, but they certainly were different outside. Or

take a man like Peter and Moses and stand them up together or even stay within the little circle of Peter's own little group, the disciples there.

Look at Philip, look at the lovely feminine John, almost feminine in his refinement, and then look at that noble, strong Elijah-like Peter. Altogether unlike each other, and yet their likeness was real because it was an internal likeness. They were alike inside, but they certainly weren't alike outside.

When God gave his church to the world, he gave a church that was basically to be one, but He also gave a church that was to provide as much of a variety as a flower garden, so that they might present an attractiveness.

I used to a dear Black man of God by the name of Brother Collet. And he used to preach and say, God makes His bouquets, and He has all colored flowers in them. He said, if they'd been all your color, they wouldn't have had any variety. So, God put me in there in order to give a little variety to it. He was perfectly right. God has his variety throughout all the Church of Christ, not only in looks, but in personality and tastes and gifts and all the rest.

And yet Peter says, be like-minded, be unanimous. What did he mean? He meant that we must all be alike in certain things. Did you notice what we're to be alike in? Be alike compassionate, be alike loving, be alike pitiful, be alike courteous, and be alike forgiving. He names it. I didn't put that in there. He said it.

Finally, be ye all one mind. This is the way to have one mind, and in these things have one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, and be forgiving, not rendering evil for evil.

So, there you have the uniformity of the man of God, the unanimity the man of God was looking for. It was an unanimity of compassion. All of God's people must be alike in that. Unanimity of love, they must all be loving. Uniformity of pity, they must unanimously be filled with a pitifulness, that is a tender heart, and courtesy, and forgiveness.

Now let's look at them then. Compassionate, and as you know, compassionate means a feeling with one another, that is a sympathetic understanding. Wherever one life touches another, because this is what unity means, it means a likeness at points of contact. We must agree wherever we touch, wherever hearts touch, wherever minds touch, there must be there an agreement, a loving agreement. And that was true of all the Bible characters.

They were alike in that they touched God, and where they touched, they were alike, but in all other things they were unlike. And it's to be in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that wherever we touch each other, there's to be unity, but in all other things there can be diversity, and difference, and variety, and the variety itself is an artistic scheme that God has introduced to bring beauty into the body of Christ.

But dissimilarity that goes through to the heart, and differences that go through to the mind, and variations that touch the throbbing heart, is like throwing a piano out of tune.

Not all the strings are alike, but all the strings are alike in this, that they bow to a certain pitch. And so, the people of God are alike in that they bow to and recognize the one holy divine pitch to which they're to be set and keyed and then after that they can be just as unlike and as free to be themselves, and be individualistic, and have complete freedom.

I suppose there never was a body of Christians that succeeded in being freer than the Quakers, and yet they did the best they could to kill it. They imposed a uniform, and they also imposed a certain address, a certain use of language. But in spite of that they had so much of that inner flame that they succeeded in presenting to the world a wonderful flower garden variety.

So, we must be alike compassionate, and that is sympathetic understanding wherever we touch, and agreement that we can disagree where we don't touch, and where it's nobody's business. And we're to have a feeling for one another, that's compassion.

And then it says loving, that we are to love the brethren, and love is, oneness where hearts touch. And there must be, there is a unity, feeling the two have become one where there is love.

Now one man, I think if I recall, it was an old bishop whose name for the moment slips me, pointed out on this verse that unanimity was to be achieved not by freezing people together, but by loving them together. He said that you can get oneness out of variety by freezing it. You can do that, you know.

You all know how if a thing freezes hard enough and solid enough, it's a unity. But it's a frozen unity. And there are churches where nobody ever disagrees with anybody else, because they've started out by agreeing that nothing really matters anyhow.

There's a church down on the south side, they've put out some literature, I suppose they all do, but I have gotten a hold of this, and they say that the basic tenet of their church is that there is no basic tenet, that you can believe anything that's decent and still be a member of their church. Well, it'd be pretty hard to agree when you had started out by agreeing that you couldn't disagree, because nobody believed anything anyhow. Now that's what you call freezing together, you see.

You can freeze four fellows together, or you can bring them together by love, and one is divine and the other is the devil's way of making people one. I don't want to be on the side of any disruptive element, certainly, and all this emphasis on unity, it's a strange and ironic joke that must have had its origin in the seventh hell down, that the generation that makes the most of unity is also the generation that has the greatest numbers of hates and suspicions and the biggest bombs and the largest armies. They can't kid me.

I can smell them from a distance, however mellifluous they sound on the radio, brother. They still don't fool me, because I know that there is no unity in the earth. There is division and hatred and hostility and borderline war. Yet they come and say, all men are brethren, there's a brotherhood of man and a fatherhood of God, and we must all forget our differences and only feel to see if the lump is still on their hip there, that lump that means a gun.

Well, we Christians don't pay any attention to the latest fad, which happens to be uniformity and everybody being like everybody else. We Christians know that there's only one way ever to achieve uniformity, and that is by loving, by compassion, by the work of God in the breast, in the soul of man, and then there can be unity even where there is a blessed and free diversity. Now, we love each other, and I say love is unanimity where hearts touch.

And then we are to be pitiful, and that word means tender-hearted according to the Greek. Now, I might say that religion will either make us very tender or very hard. There isn't anything that'll tender us like religion.

I don't like to talk about individual men, but it happens that one of my favorite people is Tom Hare, and Tom is a very tender man. I think he's so tender he's imposed on a lot by neurotic people, but nevertheless he's a tender man. But being Irish, he wouldn't have been a tender man, maybe, if God hadn't tendered him. He has enough spirituality to make him tender. But the Pharisees had enough religion to make them hard. And religion will do one thing or the other. It will either make you very tender, or very hard. And it's entirely possible to be very severe, to be indeed cruel, and do it all in the name of religion.

My rule is, whose side am I on, principle or people? Is it principle or people? Principle has been a hard, rough cross upon which human beings have been nailed through the centuries.

Principle, we say, and nail a Man up, and His blood and His tears and His sweat never affects us at all, because we pride ourselves. He's dying for a principle. Any man who'll die for a principle ought to have his long ear shaved. It's not principles that hold the moral world together. It's the presence of a holy God, and love for God and mankind.

Moral laws exist in the world. Nobody preaches that anymore with greater emphasis than I do. But to extract a principle from the holy loving heart of God and then nail man on it, and say, I'll die for that, I won't. I trust I would die for love. I trust I would die for those I love. I trust I would die for the Church of Christ. If I didn't, I'd be ashamed. But I trust that I would give my everything to the love of God and the love of mankind. That's one thing, but it's quite another thing to extract a stiff iron principle and then nail a man on it.

The Bible says, be pitiful, be tenderhearted. And you know, Christ never talked about principles. He always talked about people. When He made His great little stories to illustrate, they're called parables, never talked about principle. He always talked about people. There's always some person there, somebody that was in trouble, or somebody that was astray, or somebody that was lost, or somebody that was sent out to bring in folks, always there were people there.

Jesus Christ didn't come down from his heaven above riding on the steel beam of the divine principle, hard and stiff and cold, walk from the womb of the Virgin to the cross of Golgotha, upright as a ramrod, stiff as a beam, and die for the moral government of God. He did die for the moral government of God, but, oh brethren, He achieved His ends

not by hardness and harshness, but by love, and by caring for people. It was the people he cared for. Back of it all was the divine principle, certainly. Back of it all was the moral righteousness of God.

The holiness of the deity must be sustained if the world falls. But our Lord walked in and out of that with all the sweet smoothness, the lubricated tenderness that never irritated nor scratched. Love lubricated His spirit, and He walked among men loving men, and loving people, and loving children, and loving women, and loving the low as well as the high.

We had a great President once. We've had numbers of great Presidents, certainly, and we never know for a generation or two whether they've been great or not. We all must admit that. But we had a great president once who was a man first and a president second. They called him Honest Abe. He had a big sense of humor and a heart that could cry easily over other people's sorrows. But he had some generals who stood on ceremony and lived by principle.

And so, these poor boys taken out of the hills and away from the farms and out of the factories, conscripted and jammed without much training up to the front to fight. Being young fellas and still boys, some of them deserted. When the terror and the screaming and the dying and the blood and the sound of the gunfire got too strong, some of the boys couldn't take it. So, they turned and fled. They caught those boys and sentenced them to die one after the other.

And all the time the war was going on between the North and the South, Abraham Lincoln was busy doing everything he could do to get those boys off. On one occasion, they came in and found him sitting sad faced, turning over papers off a file, writing at the bottom of them one after the other.

Somebody said, what are you doing, Mr. President? Oh, he said, tomorrow's butcher day in the army, and they're going to shoot my boys. And he said, I'm going over these papers once more to see if I can't get some of them off. We love Abraham Lincoln for that. He was a man who loved people.

On one occasion, he had the sly, humorous effrontery to advance an argument to save a boy's hide that I suppose nobody ever advanced before nor since. And some of those stiff, hard-hearted old boys that had a principal rammed up their back tied to it so they couldn't bend, they thought he was a fool, a clown, for even advancing it. But he advanced this one time. He said, I don't want this boy shot. They said, but he ran away under fire. Well, he said he couldn't help it. He said he didn't want to do it, but his legs ran away with him. And he actually tried to push that through as an argument. The fellow's legs took him away.

Well, that was Lincoln, a combination of tenderheartedness and humor, and above all things, a great love for people. Now, I bring him in not because he was a great Christian. I doubt whether he was a great Christian. But he was a great man. And he had much that we Christians could borrow. And one of them was he was a tenderhearted, pitiful man who put people ahead of principle.

Then he says, be courteous. Now, that doesn't mean etiquette. I know that Peter had never read a book on etiquette. I got a book on etiquette one time and started to read it. And I got so discouraged about halfway through that I put the book away. I don't even know where it is now. I don't know about etiquette. It's just too much for me. Have Emily Post walking at the head of the etiquettical parade. I can't even keep in step.

But there is what the world has called nature's gentlemen. They are not bred to the palace, but they have in them a humble-mindedness and a desire to put the other person first. And they are courteous in the right sense of the term. I have been to the hills of West Virginia and of Georgia and of other states in the Union. I have gone up among the plain people, the old lady who had one dress and the half-grown daughter who had maybe one, and who went barefooted much of the time so she wouldn't wear out her precious shoes.

And as she went barefooted, her feet got big, and when she put on her precious shoes, they didn't fit, so she gave them to her smaller sister, and she ran it through the same process. That's the way they had to live. I've slept in their homes, slept in their homes where several people had to sleep in the same room, and where one little room was living room, kitchen, everything.

And I am prepared to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, that I have never elsewhere found such perfect courtesy. They were courteous almost without a single exception, those hill people, those mountain people, for they were actuated, motivated by one thing, this man's our guest, and we've got to please him no matter what it does to us. That's courtesy.

That's the kind Peter had. If Peter had been put down at a Washington function, he'd have disgraced the whole place because he wouldn't have known what knife to use or what fork or what spoon.

Peter Cartwright, the great Methodist preacher, was a man of great courtesy with no etiquette. He was eating with the governor one time, and the governor's wife said, Reverend, would you like a cup of coffee? He said that stuff scalds my stomach, I can't eat it, or can't drink it, no. And the friends around him were horrified. But the governor's wife grinned, she knew it was Peter Cartwright. And they were having chicken, and the hungry little dog sat with his head off on one side and his ears cocked by the governor's chair.

Peter cleaned each bone carefully and clipped the bone to the dog in the governor's palace dining room. And everyone was blushing with chagrin except the governor and the other folks that were big enough to know they had a man on their hands who was in all essential things a courteous man, for he put everybody else ahead of himself. But what was a little thing like throwing a bone to a dog? Dogs and bones go together. Peter had never read the book. Emily hadn't written yet when Peter lived. Be courteous.

So courtesy, then, is an unselfish regard for other people, even if it costs you something. And brethren, if we'll ask God for that kind of courtesy, humble-mindedness really is what the word is, if we'll ask God for that kind of humble-mindedness, you never need to worry too much about Emily.

Then forgiving, he says here, not rendering evil for evil, but blessing, in order that you might obtain a blessing. There's the forgiving spirit. So now you see where our uniformity comes in, our oneness. It comes in in being all alike compassion, all alike loving, all alike pitiful, all alike courteous, and all alike forgiving. And after that, you can be just as different as the leaves on the tree or the stars in the sky. And it's all right with God. He made you to be unlike other people.

Now, we come to the communion service, and we don't shift mood, for it's all of one here. Forgiving each other, not rendering evil for evil, but blessing, that you might bring a blessing. A like-minded people, unlike in a hundred ways, tastes that vary as wide as the whole scale of human thought, but all alike in being compassionate, and all alike in loving, and all alike in pity, and all alike in courtesy, and all alike in forgiveness. That's being unanimous, rather. Not unanimous in prophetic interpretations, we vary on that, and I wouldn't respect you if you agreed with me on everything. Not on modes of baptism, for there are differences of opinion amongst us. Not on interpretations always of all verses of scripture, but unanimous in forgiving, in pity, in loving, in compassion.

But if there is one negative vote, if there is in the fellowship one negative vote, one person who, when you say, who's in favor, compassion, love, pity, courtesy, forgiveness, and there is one null, unuttered but felt in the heart, one negative soul, remember that the body is harmed and the spirit is grieved and the individual himself is injured beyond all description. I trust we may give to God the unanimous consent to be all alike in all these things.