

Separation From Evil God's Principle of Unity

The need of union is felt now by every right-minded Christian. The power of evil is felt by all.

Its pressure comes too near home, its rapid and gigantic strides are too evident, and affect too nearly the particular feelings which characterise distinctively every class of Christians, to allow them to be blind to it, however little they may appreciate its true bearing and character.

Better and holier feelings, too, arouse them to the sense of common danger, and – as far as it is entrusted to man's responsibility – the danger in which the cause of God is, from those who never did, and never would spare it. This need is felt wherever the Spirit of God acts, so as to make the saints value grace and truth and one body. The feelings which the sense of the progress of evil produces may be different.

Some, though they are but few, may yet trust to the bulwarks they have long looked at, but which had their force only in a respect for them which exists no longer.

Others may trust to a fancied force of truth, which it has never exerted but in a little flock, because God and the work of His Spirit were there; others, to a union which never yet was the instrument of power on the side of good – that is, a union by concord and agreement. While others may feel bound to abstain from such an agreed union, by reason of previously subsisting obligations, or prepossessions, so that the union tends to form only a party.

But the sense of danger is universal. That which was long mocked at as a theory is now too practically felt to be denied; though the apprehensions of the word, which made those who were subjected to that mockery foresee the evil, may be rejected and slighted still. But this state of things produces difficulties and dangers of a peculiar kind to the saints, and leads to the inquiry, where the path of the saint is, and where true union is to be found.

There is danger, from the very blessedness and desirableness of union, of those who have long truly felt its value, and the obligation that lies on the saints to maintain it, being led to follow the impulses of such as refused to see it when it was spoken of from the Word, and to abandon the very principles and path which their own clearer apprehension of the Word of God led them to embrace from it, as foreseeing the coming storm.

They learnt from that precious Word that it was coming; and, while calmly studying it in the Word, saw the path marked out there for the believer as such, and indeed, in every time.

It is now pressed upon them to desert it for that suggested to men's minds by the pressure of the anxieties they anticipated, but which, though there may be an impulse of good in it, the Word of God itself did not furnish when inquired into in peace.

But is this the path of the saints, to turn from that which generally rejected intelligence of the Word afforded them, to pursue the light of those who would not see?

This, however, is not the only danger; nor is it my object to dwell on the dangers but the remedy. There is a constant tendency in the mind to fall into sectarianism, and to make a basis of union of the opposite of what I have here just alluded to: that is, of a system of some kind or other to which the mind is attached, and round which saints or others are gathered; and which, assuming itself to be based on a true principle of unity, regards as schism whatever separates from itself – attaching the name of unity to what is not God's centre and plan of unity. Wherever this is the case, it will be found that the doctrine of unity becomes a sanction for some kind of moral evil, for something contrary to the Word of God; and the authority of God Himself, which is attached to the idea of unity, becomes, through the instrumentality of this latter thought, a means of engaging the saints to

continue in evil.

Moreover, continuance in this evil is enforced by all the difficulty which unbelief finds to separate from that in which it is settled, and where the natural heart finds its ties, and, generally, temporal interests the sphere of their support. Now, unity is a divine doctrine and principle; but, as evil is possible wherever unity is taken by itself so as to be a conclusive authority, wherever evil does enter, the conclusive obligation of unity binds to the evil, because the unity, where the evil is, is not to be broken.

Of this we have a flagrant example in Romanism. There the unity of the Church is the grand basis of argument; and it has been the ground of keeping the world, we may say, in every sanctioned enormity, and made the name of Christianity its warrant: an authority to bind souls to evil, till the name itself became shameful to the natural conscience of man.

The plea of unity may then be, in a measure, the latitudinarianism which flows from the absence of principle; it may be the narrowness of a sect formed on an idea; or, it may be, as taken by itself, the claim to be the Church of God, and hence in principle to secure as much indifference to evil, as it is the convenience of the body or its rulers to allow, or is in the power of Satan to drag them into.

If the name of unity then be so powerful in itself, and in virtue of blessings withal which God Himself has attached to it, it behoves us well to understand what the unity He owns really is.

This it is I would propose to inquire into; acknowledging the desire for it to be a good thing, and many of the attempts at it to contain in them elements of godly feeling, even when the means may not carry conviction to the judgment as being those of God. Now, it will be at once admitted, that God Himself must be the spring and centre of unity, and that He alone can be in power or title.

Any centre of unity outside God must be so far a denial of His Godhead and glory, an independent centre of influence and power; and God is one – the just, true, and only centre of all true unity. Whatever is not dependent on this is rebellion. But this so simple, and, to the Christian, necessary truth, clears our way at once.

Man's fall is the reverse of this. He was a subordinate creature, an image too of Him that was to come; he would become an independent one, and he is, in sin and rebellion, the slave of a mightier rebel than himself, whether in the dispersion of several self-will, or its concentration in the dominion of the man of the earth. But then we must, in consequence of this, go a step farther.

God must be a centre in blessing as well as power, when He surrounds Himself with united and morally intelligent hosts.

We may know that He will punish rebellion with everlasting destruction from His presence into the hopelessness of uncentred and selfish individual misery and hatred; but He Himself must be a centre of blessing and holiness, for He is a holy God, and He is love.

Indeed, holiness in us – while it is by its nature separation from evil – is just having God, the Holy One, who is love too, the object, centre, and spring of our affections. He makes us partakers of His holiness – for He is essentially separate from all evil, which He knows as God, though as His contrary – but in us, holiness must consist in our affections, thoughts, and conduct being centred in, and derived from Him: a place maintained in entire dependence upon Him.

Of the establishment and power of this unity in the Son and Spirit I will speak presently. It is the great and glorious truth itself on which I now insist. This great principle is true even in creation. It was formed in unity, and God its only possible centre.

It shall be brought into it yet again, and centred in Christ as its Head, even in the Son, by whom, and for whom, all things were created. Colossians 1: 16.

It is man's glory – though his ruin, as fallen – to be made thus a centre in his place – the image of Him that is to come; * * See Ephesians 1. He hath made known to us the mystery of His will; that is, gathering together in one all things in Christ, in whom we have received an inheritance. J.N.D. but alas! his imitator in a state of rebellion in this same place, when fallen.

I know not – I would venture to say no more – that angels were ever made the centre of any system; but man was. It was his glory to be the lord and centre of this lower world – an associate but dependent Eve his companion and help in his presence. He was the image and glory of God. His dependence made him look up; and this is true glory and blessedness to all but God. Dependence looks up, and is exalted above itself.

Independence must look down – for it cannot in a creature be filled with itself – and is degraded. Dependence is true exaltation in a creature when the object of it is right.

The primæval state of man was not holiness, in the proper sense of it, because evil was not known.

It was not a divine – but it was a blessed creation – state; it was innocence. But this was lost in the assertion of independence. If man became as God, knowing good and evil, it was with a guilty conscience, the slave of the evil he knew, and in an independence he could not sustain himself in, while he had morally lost God to depend on. With this state – for we must now descend to the present actual question of unity – with man in this state, God has to deal, if true real unity, such as He can own, is to be attained. Now, He must be still the centre. It is not therefore in mere creative power. Evil exists. The world is lying in wickedness, and the God of unity is the Holy God.

Separation therefore, separation from evil, becomes the necessary and sole basis and principle, I do not say the power, of unity.

For God must be the centre and power of that unity, and evil exists: and from that corruption they must be separate who are to be in God's unity; for He can have no union with evil.

Hence, I repeat, we have this great fundamental principle, that separation from evil is the basis of all true unity.

Without this, it is more or less attaching God's authority to evil, and rebellion against His authority; as is all unity independent of Him.

It is a sect in its lightest and feeblest forms; in its fullest, it is the great apostasy, of which one of the characteristics, as ecclesiastical or secular power, is unity; but unity by subjection of man to what is independent really or openly of God because it is of His Word; not established by subjection to the Holy One, according to His Word,** and by the power of the Spirit working in those that are united, and by His presence, which is the personal power of union in the body.

** This is characteristic of the independent unity. I believe that it will be in an openly infidel state, and a manifestation of the power of Satan.