

Our Lord's Ideal for His Church.

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Text: Jno. 17: 22, 23. "And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that thou didst send me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." (R. V.).

All the desires of the Son of God, and all the designs of his incarnation are summarized in this incomparable prayer. As in the sunrise, there is first the gray dawn, then the gilding of the clouds, then the radiation of brightness, till the effulgent glory tells us noon is here and the sun's shining has reached the climax, so in the Sermon on the Mount the divine nature first glimmered forth its light and love in the beatitudes, then miracles revealed "the hiding of his power," benevolences translated a heart of sympathy, tears voiced a soul of world-circling compassion; but in this prayer the sublime is reached in the unfolding of the heart of the Eternal Son, in his longing for the unity of his disciples, and to have his bride with him in heaven in all the glory of her perfected life.

Let us consider—

I. Christ's Ideal for His Church.

Verse 23. "That they may be perfected into one."

Verse 22. "That they may be one even as we are one."

Four times in this prayer our Lord makes a special plea for the unity of his disciples, and each time instancing the blessed oneness of the Trinity as the type of unity he desires to be accomplished in and realized by his followers.

Verse 11. "Holy Father keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are."

Verse 21. "That they may all be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us."

Verse 22. "And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them, that they may be one, even as we are one."

Verse 23. "I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one." (R. V.).

The pervading thought in this prayer is the unity of the church of God by her union with the Son of God. Then as a sequence appears that superbly beautiful truth, "likeness by unity." Likeness to Christ is the state foretold of the redeemed in heaven, secured by their union with and in Christ on earth. To secure the image of God's Son in all God's children, and a consequent unity among themselves, reflecting that of the Trinity, is the finality of Revelation.

This thought was born in the heart of the Father, but was unembodied till born again in the heart of God's Incarnate Son. This wonderful truth was mysteriously symbolized by the perfected temple, dimly outlined by inspired prophets and enshrined by the psalmody of Israel's sweet singer. Jesus felt it burning in his soul as a boy; it rose an apocalyptic vision in the temple, its pursuit he knew to be his "Father's business," and through all the vicarious suffering and satanic temptations he endured as seeing it, though invisible, and had respect unto the recompense of his reward.

To make its realization possible he left heaven, having emptied himself, taking the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of men, in order that the four great foundation stones might be laid, on which this four-square city should rise,—those stones being the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension.

In this prayer the method of its accomplishment is as clearly indicated as the design in view. With them is indissolubly linked the fact that the perfecting of a great multitude, which no man can number, into a united church, is the counterpart of the glorious plan unfolded in this prayer, namely, that the perfect Son of God must have a perfect bride to share heaven with him in the glory of the Father. The beginning Creation; the end Glorification. The intermediate means, regeneration, illumination, sanctification, discipline and service, required the planning of the Father, the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

There is no clue to such a design, much less the provision of such operative means, in the other four sacred books of the East, namely, "The Vedas," the Hindoo's Bible; "The Koran," the Mahometan Scriptures; "The Tri-pitaka," the Buddhist's Bible; or the Scriptures of the Parsees, "The Zend Avesta."

We must enter the sanctuary of Divine Revelation and by the Spirit of God perceive the plan of God, being accomplished by the Son of God. By entering human hearts, controlling human lives, and uniting millions all over the world, "in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord . . . for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Our Lord's ideal for his church, as voiced in this prayer, is that the scattered believers "be perfected into one." Are we to understand that these diverse personalities, with habits so foreign to each other, are to become one, blended into one great individual body, distinct from the Trinity? That the united church is to become a kind of

copy of the united Godhead? Not according to this prayer of Jesus.

For perfection attained by conformity to an ideal would be liable to change. And certainly it would retrograde as soon as there was a cessation of the final effort by which the perfection was reached. Have we not seen even Christian characters grow up to a point of envious beauty, but because they ceased to pray, or ceased to pay, they ceased to stay, and back they slid to a conformity to the world, deplorable.

I know that the great apostle Paul says, "We all with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory." But how? Not by the human imitating the Divine, but "even as from the Lord the Spirit." Hence not by conformity to the letter, that killeth, but by unity of the Spirit, that giveth life, will likeness to Christ be attained, and therefore likeness to each other. "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

To redeem his bride the Son must come in person, die in her stead, pay the ransom, then return home and prepare a place for her. Meantime she must be prepared for the place. Hence the Holy Spirit, God's second gift, must do for her on earth the sequel of what the Son is doing for her in heaven. Consequently these two preparations are proceeding simultaneously. Christ preparing the place for the church and the Spirit preparing the church for the place.

A church of God for God was the design of the Eternal, but how to unify the redeemed into a glorified whole was a part of the plan which, in splendid isolation, we call the masterpiece of all the works of God. This leads us to consider—

II. Christ's appointed means for the church's attainment of this Ideal.

Verse 23. "I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one."

The marvel of the miracle in Bethlehem was almost paralleled in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Divinity entered a body at the first place, and no less was done at the second. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." To us it seems easier, at least more fitting, for the Holy Son to enter a holy babe, than for the Holy Spirit to enter sinful man. But as comparative ideas of ease and difficulty cannot apply to Godhead it was simply that "with God all things are possible." Anno Domini 4 Christ entered the human and dwelt among us, A. D. 99 he enters the human and dwells among us. All our Lord's teaching involves his possession of power to make his abode in humanity in all ages, in every land. Unless the ability and right be conceded the Christ to enter the hearts and control the lives of all who believe, we must relegate this prayer to the realm of the visionary and the self-deceived. From this part of our Lord's great prayer, "I in them and thou in me, that the way may be perfected into one," we learn that the incarnation was to be a perpetuated miracle. The initial stage of a permanent indwelling of Godhead in manhood. The enthronement of a truth in a centre that should finally extend its sway to the circumference of the realm of grace.

The Son of God came as it was written of him, "in the volume of the Book," to do the will of God in and through a human body; "a body hast thou prepared me." And after his ascension he continued to do that will through other human bodies to the end of time.

The incarnation and the founding of the kingdom were contemporaneous. As the parable of the leaven symbolizes the kingdom of heaven growing intensively, and the parable of the mustard seed represents the kingdom growing extensively, so the coming of the divine life into humanity was to deepen and broaden, till all the saints should "be perfected into one," and Christ should have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. "I in them" is luminously enlarged upon in the epistles, in which this truth is taught through an allegory; Christ is "the Head over all things to the church, which is his body." All his disciples form his mystical body. Mystical means "hidden." As our souls are hidden in our bodies, so the mystical body of Christ is hidden in our souls. "The kingdom of God is within you." It is through the members of his body that Jesus, the Head, continues to do "all that he began both to do and teach."

Such is the organic union between the head of the human body and its members, that the head may truly say "I am in them." The head being the communicating medium of the soul to the lower members. And as vital is the union between Christ and Christians that he says "I in them."

"I in them" means the possession of the seat of thought, the mind. This secures the circulation of divine thought through all the members of his body, hence unity of thought of the Headship (which means the Lordship of Christ) must be the point of true, abiding and abounding union. "I in them," means Christ's possession of the organ of thought, the brain. This secures unity in the expression of thought about his Lordship of the church. Hence those Christians who are united to Christ the Head, and to each other as members of his mystical body, are drawn like to like because

of the spiritual affinity of their natures. "I in them" is the centripetal force in the world-wide kingdom of heaven.

On the other side those who are out of the body of Christ will disagree about the great fundamental truths of the gospel. And with a terrible emphasis they illustrate the fatal centrifugal force of unbelief, which drives souls from Christ into the realm of disunion and darkness.

But this indwelling of the Christ is not a passive one, but active. "I in them" is the Divine means for perpetuating the Christ-life, the Christ-walk and Christ's work among men. We admit the Light of the World that we may emit light to the world.

In the closing verse of this prayer the Son asks the Father "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Clearly it is that the coming of Jesus into the soul means also the incoming of that which was the all-inspiring motive of his heart and the all-impelling power of his life, Love. Love as it first (if there ever was a first to that which is eternal) shone forth in its divine purity, beauty and power from the Father to the Son. This deeply fixed, fiery bliss, which laid all that Christ was and had under tribute, in the filling out of the Father's plan, Jesus prays, "May be in them and I in them."

Indisputably then Jesus and love must come together into the disciple's soul. They were inseparable in the Incarnate God, and they cannot be apart in the brothers of God's Son. "I in them" is to continue the loveliness and the lovingness of Jesus, through living personalities united in him. It is Christ's way of bringing to pass in other lives those qualities that made his own life so unique. And that by bringing into the very centre of thought and volition the great motive power that supports self and leads to sacrificial deeds for the good of others. Thus proving a thousandfold more effectively than can creed, history or logic that Christianity is of divine origin, because the qualities recorded of its Author are duplicated (though in miniature) in the lives of his disciples.

Thus shall the prayer of Jesus be answered as there is accomplished in us the reciprocal obligations which divine love imposes on his followers. For the fulfilling of the law of love will evidence our union with each other, because united in Christ.

This part of the prayer given for exposition and enforcement, contains the singular clause "Thou in me." The mystery of the Godhead cannot be comprehended by finite minds, but the incarnation has enabled us to apprehend it. And eternity will be too short for the utterance of our gratitude for the revelation given to us through him "who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person."

This prayed-for-union of believers could never have been wrought by man alone. The Word has shown that God must become man in order to bridge the chasm caused by sin. As Dean Hooker beautifully puts it, "No union of God with man, without that mean between both which is both."

"Thou in me" is the Son's acknowledgment of the co-operation of the Trinity in the incarnation and its marvellous sequences; and yet it is not a disownment by him of his distinct personality. But a mark of that great humility which characterizes persons who are perfect in love. The illustration of which we see in the apocalyptic vision, where the redeemed perfected in love ascribe all the glory of redemption to the Lamb.

The Trinity is happy because one, they are one because they are love. The Trinity is therefore extending its own happiness in the unification of the saints. "If we love one another God dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us."

III. This blessed unity of the church is the Christ's chosen method for proving to the world the divineness of his coming. "That the world may know that thou didst send me."

Divine love transmuted into human character created in the minds of the heathen at Antioch the idea of comparing the lives of their converted fellow-citizens with the life of Christ. And finding points of similarity between them found it fitting and easy to name them after their Master, "They were first called Christians at Antioch." The word Christian is both a derivative and diminutive of the great word "Christ," and, therefore, must mean "little Christs." Not in the same degree, yet of the same quality, if believers repeat the unity of the Godhead, the world will know that God sent his Son from heaven to earth whether they believe or not.

The world cannot see the invisible Christ but it can his visible church, and it never can know more of the Christ in heaven than it can learn through the lives of his people on earth. Human natures can often get at the abstract through the concrete, and evidently our Lord intended that his church should be to the world what an illustrated Bible is to a child, or an object lesson to eyes that are bounded by the horizon of matter. Unspiritual men can only know these spiritual things through their eyes. Rome's interpretation of this prayer is to reduce all Christians to a dead uniformity in religious belief. But does the world know that God sent Christ into the world through the lives of our Catholic friends?