

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON #39

ENDEAVOR TO KEEP THE UNITY

(Ephesians)

One of the major themes of the Ephesians is Unity, and in this epistle, Paul teaches us how to create the oneness spoken of by the Savior in the Doctrine and Covenants when he said, "If ye are not one, ye are not mine." (D&C 38:27) Paul talks about unity in several ways:

1. Paul teaches that the purpose of the dispensation of the fullness of times is to gather all things together in one
2. Paul teaches the need for unity within the church community because we are all children of the same Father in Heaven
3. Apostles and prophets help us maintain unity in the church
4. Paul teaches unity between husband and wife and between parents and children.
5. Paul teaches us not to have unity with the wickedness of the world

Since it is Conference time again, perhaps you will pardon a personal note and a heartfelt observation about the unity that comes from our interaction with the apostles and prophets of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

The story begins in Santos, a costal city in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil, where I was serving as a missionary. I had been struggling for a couple of weeks with a terrifying inability to control my thoughts. I don't know why it happened or even how much of it was a result of my own weakness. I remember feeling that I was not pursuing a course of my own choosing, but that did not diminish the pain I suffered with the problem. I said then and have said since in discussing this matter that I was in Hell. I hated to leave the apartment, so great was my

fear of what my mind would do to me on the streets. I fasted and prayed and sought a blessing from my companion and district, but all with out discernable results.

During this experience I got a call from the Mission President. Elder Spencer W. Kimball was coming to dedicate a new chapel in São Vicente, which was in my Zone. The President indicated that Elder Kimball would have time in the morning for a Zone Conference with the missionaries of the Santos Zone and he asked me to make the necessary arrangements. I was to organize the meeting so that Elder Kimball would have time to interview every missionary and to speak to them in a combined session. I was jubilant over the prospect. I would explain my problem with thoughts to this member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Certainly he would be able to help me. I felt such a need for help that I prepared for the meeting by fasting again, pleading with the Lord to empower his servant to know how to help me.

I planned the conference carefully. After the opening ceremonies, Elder Kimball could interview the elders while we conducted some business and the Mission President spoke. Then, when the President was finished and the interviews were completed, Elder Kimball could speak to the Zone. I think we had about 18 Elders in the Santos Zone, so things ought to have worked out about right. I got the meeting started and then went to sit with the last row of Elders in the chapel. The President began his speech and Elder Kimball began his interviews with elders on the front row.

President Hicken spoke for about an hour, and his assistants also spoke briefly. The elders being interviewed left the chapel and returned,

one at a time. Because of where I was sitting, I would be the last one interviewed. The elder next to me had been out for about five minutes. It was nearly my turn. I was praying silently, my head down, for the Lord to give me a solution to my problems during the interview when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up. It was Elder Kimball.

"Elder," he whispered, "I'm out of time. I need to deliver my message and travel to São Vicente for the dedication of the chapel. Would it be all right if I interviewed you the next time I come to Brazil?"

My heart felt like a dishrag-wet, twisted, wrung out within me. I needed this interview! I had fasted and prayed in preparation. How could this be happening? And, of course, I smiled and said, "That will be fine, Elder Kimball," As he walked to the front of the chapel, I leaned back with tears in my eyes, and cried out "Why?" in my heart.

Elder Kimball waited for a moment while an assistant finished speaking, and then he gave a powerful sermon on controlling thoughts. The message may have been a blessing to others, but I knew, sitting there and listening in wonder and joy, that it was intended for me. I learned two things that day. I learned how to control my thoughts (the approach was not the same one suggested by Elder Packer in conference in October of 1973), but it worked for me!) and I learned that the Lord could respond to my very personal needs through the inspired public utterances of his servants.

That experience, my friends, has united me more with the leaders of the Church than any other thing that has happened to me. It has had an influence on every

conference I have listened to for years. I know that the Lord can give me very personal answers in the midst of very public discourses from his prophets and seers and other General Authorities.

I. THE DISPENSATION OF THE FULLNESS OF TIMES (Eph. 1:9,10)

As an introduction to the theme of unity, Paul speaks of the fullness of times. What does he indicate will be one of the major achievements of this dispensation? (Eph. 1:10--gather together in one all things)

What are some of the things that are being "gathered together in one" in our day? Think about such things as: Scriptures, members of the church, records of the dead, families through the sealing power.

What remarkable thing will this unification of God's goodness and grace and glory enable us to know? What will it cause to happen in the lives of the faithful? Read the following verses:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what [is] the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set [him] at his own right hand in the heavenly [places], Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come . . . (Eph 1:17-21)

We read in Mosiah 15:7 that the will of the Son was "swallowed up in the will of the Father." It was as though every desire, every need, every duty, every hope was subordinated to this overriding commitment of the Savior to his Father. His whole life was gathered together in one in his Father.

In a personal and wonderful way, these verses in Ephesians suggest that our will ought to be swallowed up in the will of Christ, as his will is in the Father. What a longing we should have to gather all of our things—our families and our desires and our love, in Christ.

II. JESUS CHRIST IS OUR CORNERSTONE (Eph. 2:12-22; 4:1-16)

Review Eph. 2:11-22; 4:1-6 and identify all the words, phrases, and ideas that suggest unity and oneness. You may wish to mark these words and phrases and ponder their meanings. A few examples of the many possible answers are: commonwealth, one body, fellowcitizens, fellowheirs, fellowship, with all saints, unity of the Spirit, one God and Father of all.

What is the main kind of unity Paul is encouraging in these passages? (Unity of those who belong to the church community, i.e., Jew and Gentile, different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.)

On this matter of unity in the Church, Joseph Smith said:

It is likewise very satisfactory to my mind, that there has been such a good understanding between you, and that the Saints have so cheerfully hearkened to counsel, and vied with each other in this labor of love, and in the promotion of truth and righteousness. This is as it should be in the Church of Jesus Christ; unity is strength. How pleasing it is for

brethren to dwell together in unity!" Let the Saints of the Most High ever cultivate this principle, and the most glorious blessings must result, not only to them individually, but to the whole Church—the order of the kingdom will be maintained, its officers respected, and its requirements readily and cheerfully obeyed.
(*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.174)

What point does Paul make to emphasize the importance of this kind of unity? (Eph. 3:14-15; 4:6--We are all one family, children of the same Father in Heaven)

Why is this kind of unity important in the church today? What can we do to promote this kind of unity? How does the missionary program of the church help create this kind of unity? How does our work for the dead help promote this kind of unity? What kind of forces are at work in the church and world that make the realization of this kind of unity more difficult?

I had a telemarketer call me on the phone. The young lady had a *strong* accent. It was so difficult to understand her questions about fast food and family eating habits. I wondered why the sponsoring organization couldn't arrange to have people make calls who speak more fluently. I was tempted again and again to give up my efforts to understand and terminate the call so that I could work on this lesson. But in my own ward and Sunday School class I greet wonderful members from India who have an equally thick accent. I home teach a wonderful family from Africa. I have a young man from Nigeria in my Institute class. Am I to give up in my efforts to understand and care because of differences as insignificant as language or culture.

The great power of this unity is that because of it we care for each other. I have an longing for the Celestial Kingdom, but I do not want to go there alone. I am thinking now of my family and the wonderful people in my ward and in my classes. Which of them would I be

willing to leave behind in my journey to the Holy City? Are there any of them that do not belong in Zion? Of course not. None of us wants to leave anyone behind.

What is the unity Paul speaks of in Eph. 4:5? (doctrinal unity) Differences in doctrine and ordinances have divided the Christian community into so many different factions. We have watched on our televisions senseless slaughter and carnage born of religious divergence. We have read of the historical battles fought under the banner of a twisted Christianity. But Paul speaks of a time and a way to bring us all to a "unity of the faith."

What does Paul indicate the Lord has provided to enable us to overcome this tendency to fragmentation? (Eph. 4:11-16)

How must we respond to these leaders for the goal of unity Paul speaks of to be achieved?

What other purposes can be met by the guidance of inspired men within the Kingdom of God? What other results will come to us from hearkening to the counsel of our leaders (perfecting, edifying, freedom from the doctrines of men, becoming Christlike---Eph 4:12-14)

III. UNITY BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE AND BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN. (Eph. 5:21-33, Eph. 6:1-4)

What is the unity Paul speaks of in Eph. 5:21-33? (Unity of husband and wife) This is an excellent opportunity for you who are married to ask some important questions about your relationship with your spouse. Are you one? Do your children sense and trust your oneness, your unity? Is your relationship indicative of the beauty of Christ's relationship with the church? Do you seek one another's welfare with the same devotion employed by Christ as he seeks the welfare of the Church?

What does Paul counsel wives to do in order to create marital unity? What does Paul counsel husbands to do in order to create marital unity?

What is the unity Paul speaks of in Eph. 6:1-4? (Unity of parents and children)

What does Paul counsel children to do in order to create family unity? What does Paul counsel fathers to do in order to create family unity?

How does a parent nurture a child in the Lord? (6:4)

How does a parent admonish a child in the Lord? (6:4)

Which parent, according to Paul, is most likely to provoke a child to wrath? (6:4)

V. PUTTING ON THE "NEW MAN" AND THE "WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD" (Eph.4:21-32; 5:1-20)

* What does Paul warn us not to have unity or "fellowship" with? (Eph. Eph.5:11)

What are examples of the "works of darkness" Paul discusses? (Eph. Eph.2:1-7; Eph.4:17-32; 5:1-20)

What are the dangers of having "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness?" Why is this kind of fellowship so destructive to the other kinds of unity spoken of by Paul?

Sister Sharon Larson, 2nd counselor in the Young Women's Presidency, spoke of this danger in October Conference, 1999.

Our faith and commitment are tested when the world offers tempting and enticing alternatives that can turn our faces from the Lord's kingdom. Some would like to live in that eternal city and still keep a "summer home" in

Babylon (Sharon G. Larsen, "Agency—A Blessing and a Burden," Ensign, Nov. 1999, 12).

Why is it so difficult to be comfortable in both Zion and Babylon? How many movies and TV shows have you seen in recent months that would never be shown in a Zion society? What happens to someone who tries to serve two masters? (Matt. 6:24) Thus the Lord said:

Go ye out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness, which is spiritual Babylon. (D&C 133:14)

Joshua said, "Choose you this day" (Josh. 24:15) and Elijah asked, "How long halt ye between two opinions?" (1Kings 18:21) I suppose that it is impossible to build a divided house on one Rock—the rock of Christ. People who want to live in Zion and Babylon will "stumble and fall when the storms descend, and the winds blow, and the rains descend, and beat upon their house." (D&C 90:5)

Refusing the enticement of the world will assist us in becoming new people. In order to help us avoid unity with the world, what counsel does Paul give? (Eph. 6:11-18) There is a great in the world today to put on the "WHOLE armour of God," and to do "All" in order to avoid unity with the world. (Eph 6:11,13)

What does the following passage suggest about our need for this armour?

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12).

These enemies cannot be resisted with a catcher's mitt and a sharp stick. Even a high powered rifle and a selection of hand grenades will not protect us. Since

Satan *encompasses* the saints as he makes war with them see D&C 76:296:29, and since we do not know all the ways we can commit sin (see Mosiah 4:29), we must have a special armor—the whole armor of God. We need to protect every part of our beings from the enticements of evil.

CONCLUSION: After Alma organized a church among his people, he told them

that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism, having their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another (Mosiah 18:21).

We do well in this church with our eyes and our faith and our baptism, but we need to do a lot more knitting of hearts with unity and love.

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