

“UNITY” — The Sheep and the Shepherd
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My part of the subject of Unity is that which has to do with the 10th chapter of John dealing with The Sheep and the Shepherd, and the contrast as revealed in Ezekiel, Chapter 34.

The 10th chapter of John outlines to us the position of our Lord Jesus as a shepherd, who has earned his position by his special merit of being a “good” shepherd. He said, V. 11, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” Then he makes a contrast, and this is the very contrast that is found in the 34th chapter of Ezekiel. “But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.” (Vs. 12 and 13) This seemed a bit odd to me that an hired shepherd would flee when the wolf appeared, because you would suppose he would lose his job if he ran off and did not protect the sheep. So I thought I would turn to Smith’s Bible Dictionary and see what I could learn. I looked up the word “wolf” and I found out that he was a ferocious animal and dangerous. In Ezek. 22:27 we read, “Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood...” So apparently the wolves were fierce and much to be feared, especially if a pack of them would attack. So an hireling would be inclined to forsake the sheep when there was an attack by wolves, and flee from danger to his person and possibly to his life.

Smith’s Dictionary gives a glimpse of the life of a shepherd—“He was exposed to the extremes of heat and cold; his food frequently consisted of the precarious supplies afforded by nature, such as the fruit of the ‘sycamore’ or Egyptian fig, the ‘husks’ of the carob-tree, and perchance the locusts and wild honey...; he had to encounter the attacks of wild beasts, occasionally of the larger species, such as lions, wolves, panthers and bears; nor was he free from the risk of robbers or predatory hordes.” “In certain localities, moreover, towers were erected for the double purpose of spying an enemy at a distance and protecting the flock.” In Micah 4:8, for example, we read of the “tower of the flock.” This would very appropriately apply to our Lord Jesus as the one who was in a tower for the very purpose of watching all around, and at a distance to spy the approach of enemies and then protect his sheep.

It could very well have been in the mind of Jesus, when he spoke of himself as “the good shepherd who would give his life for the sheep” that he was meaning that he was going to give himself a ransom for the redemption of the race. He would have two flocks in mind—his own sheep of the gospel age, and the other sheep of the millennial age. This is clearly taught in Vs. 15 and 16, “As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold;

them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

And there is a very sweet thought given in Vs. 3 and 4, “... and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” And I think here we can bring in the thought of unity—the sweet unity between the Shepherd and his flock. The True Shepherd loves the sheep—they are his, they belong to him, and he has a voice that speaks in love for his sheep. The sheep detect those tones of love and it is life to them, and they reject other voices that are lacking in love for them—voices of the hirelings, who love themselves and the selfishness in the voices of the hirelings is detected by the Lord’s sheep and they will not follow such voices.

What is there in the voice of the good shepherd that contains the tones of love for the sheep—“his sheep”? Well, one accent has been already touched upon—he gave his life for us. Now that certainly shows deep and personal love—that he would actually sacrifice his life in behalf of his own sheep. But that isn’t the only accent of love in the voice of our good shepherd. Another accent of love is in the promise of the Holy Spirit to be our Helper all down through the Gospel Age. This is worded for us in John 16:13, “the spirit of truth...will guide you into all truth...and show you things to come.” What a loving provision this has been for the sheep all down through the Gospel age—precious truth has been provided for our guidance and encouragement, while the world around us has been in darkness. And this is especially true of the Lord’s sheep here in the end of the age, when the “good shepherd” has returned to claim the sheep that had been asleep, and deal with the sheep that remain and get them ready for their change and exaltation.

Still another accent is found in the words of Jesus the last night he was with his disciples. In fact there are a number of accents of love in his last words addressed to his bewildered sheep, the last few hours he was with them. In John 14, Vs. 2 and 3, Jesus said that in his Father’s house were many mansions, and he was going away to prepare a place for his sheep and that he would come again and receive his disciples to himself, that where he was, they would be with him. Want his disciples to be where he was?!! Can you think of any sweeter thought—that he was looking forward to returning and gathering his sheep, so they could be where he was?!! If a person wants you for your companionship, that is surely an accent of personal love. And a very delightful companion thought is given in the 12th V.—“He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.” No jealousy here—Jesus was pleased to reveal to his disciples that they would be in a position of favor and power eventually and that they would do even greater works than he did on earth. And this pointed forward to the time when the disciples would be associated with our Lord in the Kingdom and institute permanent cures for the people and lead them on to eternal life as kings on this earth. Truly our shepherd loves us by showing that he rejoiced in the

exaltation of his sheep to be with him and bless all the families of the earth as the Seed of Abraham.

We as the Lord's sheep have a blessed unity together in appreciation of our Lord's love for all of us personally; and we can work together to assist in "provoking one another to love and good works." This is the way the Apostle Paul expresses the matter in Heb. 10:24—he said let us consider one another in so blessing one another.

Another accent of love is found in John 14:14, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." As it is so well expressed in John 15:7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." What a wonderful thought is here of close unity—after we are "in Christ" then we are to have the intention of all his words guide our lives, and if we do that, then our petitions will be granted. And if we are all united in this same spirit then we will make progress in all things that are good, in his service, and in character development. In so doing, we will have fervent love for one another and for the Lord, and he will delight in us, to show us more and more of God's will and truth. Jesus said, John 14:23, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Nothing could be grander than this.

In John 10:27 to 29 Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." What a wonderful thought of the Shepherd's love for us is given here—he assures us that the Father is pledged to protect us and no man is able to injure our spiritual interests. The Shepherd's voice is sweet to us.

We turn now for a few moments to consider the contrast given to us in the 34th chapter of Ezekiel—"hireling shepherds". We start out with the 2nd V., "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" This was true of the shepherds of Natural Israel, and the principles can be applicable to the shepherds of Nominal Spiritual Israel. The false shepherds ate well and clothed themselves with wool, but they did not feed the flock. They did not heal the diseased nor the sick; and they neglected those that were driven away and did not seek those that had become lost, but ruled with force and cruelty. The sheep were scattered and became meat for the beasts of the field.

A fearful judgment is pronounced against the false shepherds. The 10th V. words it this way—"Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hands, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves

any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.” Then in the 11th and 12th Vs. the Lord said, “Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.”

I think the words of Jesus fit into this prophecy perfectly. What did he say, Matt. 15:24, “...I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Yes the sheep had been deprived of the pure word of the Lord and had been fed instead upon the traditions of the elders. The leaders were intent upon honors and not concerned about whether the sheep were fed properly and healed of their character diseases. If the sheep were scattered and lost, apparently there was no interest taken in them. And this seeking out the lost sheep by Jesus was done in a cloudy and dark day when Jesus declared “your house is left unto you desolate,” (Matt. 23:38) and this fearsome judgment ended in the year 70 A.D. In the 18th verse it was declared the evil course that would be taken by the false shepherds—“Seeing it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet.” Ezekiel 34:18 Yes, they had access to the word of the Lord, but they fouled it all up with their traditions—and they stamped down the pastures with their feet and fouled up their water with their feet.

And we see the same situation or condition with nominal spiritual Israel. Upon our Lord’s return, he sought out his sheep, and called them out of Babylon—“Come out of her my people.” And what delightful pasturage the hungry sheep found when they came out of Babylon; how pure the water of Truth was, when they came out, and how deeply and long they drank of that pure truth; and we have abundant pasturage and water to satisfy our spiritual needs as new creatures. And what a unity was experienced by these sheep! Nothing like it was ever known except in the beginning of the Gospel age. Now we have a relationship to our Heavenly Bridegroom, our Heavenly Shepherd that satisfies our longings, as was not the case when the wheat and tares were growing together.

He knocked on the door and said, “if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” (Rev. 3:20) If we are to have unity of the spirit, what makes up that spirit in our day? What disposition must we have? Perhaps the first facet of our unity would be gratitude for the blessings from God. Then gratitude to our Redeemer for all he has done for us. Gratitude for the precious Harvest Truth would come a close second, for it is the Truth that makes the will of God clear to us, and the promises. Next we must have unity of interest in everyone on earth—our families, our neighbors, our brethren in Christ, yes even our enemies. We must become involved in the sense that we are interested in the welfare of all around us. As Paul says in Gal. 6:10, we are to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the

household of faith. In 1 Pet. 3:8, 9, we read, “Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous...”

We must have unity of spirit that is willing to change old ways of thinking and action for those outlined in the Word of God—we must become transformed. We must have unity of spirit in the proper use of combativeness, and not want to fight one another. When we speak, we must speak the Truth in love. In line with this we are to provoke one another to love and good works by the way we act, and by the way we speak. We are to have consideration for one another’s temperament and try not to irritate, but to build up and comfort, and encourage one another.

There is to be unity of spirit on the part of our leaders that they do not try to promote their own pet ideas, but stick closely to the Divine plan and its purposes in our lives. So many times independent thinkers create ideas from their own minds, rather than promote sound and wholesome truth. We must be united to one another and to our Beloved Shepherd through the precious influence of the Truth upon us, and not through some organizational ties.

We are united in spirit in the realization that we are living in a time of special enlightenment, and we have as a result a harmonized Bible, like no other people on earth. We are united in awe over the message we have in our Bibles and this understanding gives us perfect satisfaction of mind and heart, and we know that we could not find anything that would even approach the blessedness we have derived from the Harvest Message. We have unity of spirit too, in knowing that we are in a very severe testing time and we must be very watchful and conscientious in all that we do and say, yes, in all that we think. We know that Satan would like to draw us away by his allurements, and that we will be drawn away if we are selfish in spirit, and not following our Shepherd in the Narrow Way.

We are united in spirit, in the disposition to all be good spiritual mathematicians—we must add to our faith the various graces of the spirit; we must subtract—put away from ourselves all the disgraces of the spirit; we must rightly divide the truth; and then “Grace and peace will be multiplied unto us through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (2 Pet. 1:2, 3)

What a wonderful relationship we have, all belonging to the same flock and having the same Good Shepherd. Our unity is not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit of God that we recognize in one another. We are united in being clothed with humility, endeavoring to see and appreciate worth in one another. If we are loving the brethren

along the lines laid down for us by the Father of our Good Shepherd, then we have unity of spirit, and know that we have passed from death unto life.

(The foregoing is part 4 of a symposium, Saturday evening, April, 7, 1973, Wilmington convention; on the subject of UNITY. Part 1—"The Body" by Bro. Kindig. Part 2—"Bride and Bridegroom" by Bro. Rawson. Part 3—"The City" by Bro. Tsimonis. Part 4—"The Shepherd and the Sheep" by Bro. T. Smith. Part 5—"The Vine and the Branches" by Bro. Gaunt.)