

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Preserve the Unity of the Spirit

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER SR.

The Secret of God's Plan — Studies in
Ephesians — Study Four

MARTIN H. SCHARLEMANN

Theological Observer

A Response

Homiletics

Brief Studies

Book Review

Vol. XLI

July-August 1970

No. 7

Preserve the Unity of the Spirit

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER SR.

Surely there is no gift for the human race that we desire more at this hour than unity. Nations fight nations, classes stand embattled against classes, spouses and children draw apart from each other. The most deadly illness of the individual today is alienation, the sense of being alone. Would that there could be unity to draw us together!

The church speaks much of unity in these days. At the national level Lutheran synods seek to implement the formal declaration of unity. But we all know that this must reach much farther below the surface of denominations. Every parish church has its problem of cleavage between individuals and groups. Also Christian families show the same pressures that fragment their neighbors. Unity is not an abstract label for an ideal, but it is the word for countless interwoven activities that bind people together and help them overcome the erosions of disunity.

The sections of this essay center in the unity of the Spirit, that unity which God Himself works because of our Lord Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We shall employ the great document of the New Testament that focuses on the unity between Christians, namely, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. This letter is so timely because it is directed to a problem

The author is graduate professor of homiletics at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. This essay was delivered to the convention of the Southern California District of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, April 1—3, 1970.

that sounds contemporary, the hostility between Christians of differing races. It is so useful because it directs itself to God's people one by one, in their relations with each other as individuals, in their families and employment, in their congregational worship, in their relation to their pastors and teachers. Ephesians does not allow us to be spectators of Christian unity or theorizers about it, but it enlists us to practice it, to work hard for it. Unity

cannot be created by man: it is given to him, but his responsibility is to *keep* it, to guard it in the face of many attempts from within and without the Church to take it away.¹

I. GOD GIVES UNITY

A. The Letter to the Ephesians goes all the way to the source: it starts from the beginning when it enlists Christians in the task of unity. Unity is God's work and gift. It is one of the "spiritual blessings in the heavenly places" (1:3) with which God blesses us in Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior. But it isn't just a fringe benefit of belonging to God or being redeemed by Him. "He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will" (1:5). Before there ever was a world God had a plan: to have a body of human beings that would mirror His own concern for them by their concerns for each other, the concern of love.

¹ Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 110.

He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. (1:9-10)

God made the world through His Son. But He foresaw the disunity and the splintering that would occur among people as they broke away from His will and plan. And so through that same Son God moved to bring the exploding and warring fragments back together. God simply spoke the great words of the creation and the universe at large, down to the tiniest grain of sand and drop of water, came to be. But it took an even mightier Word of God to unify what had been broken, for that breach of unity, that frustration of the plan of God, had cut to the heart of God, and it still does. It defiles His purpose, it is a stench in His nostrils. Thus in remedy God gave up His own Son.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. (1:7-8)

He entered our world as a man and gave Himself up for us all. Before He died He prayed for us as He prayed for His disciples:

For their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth. I do not pray for these only, but also for those who are to believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and Thou in Me, that they may become perfectly one,

so that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me. (John 17:19-23)

God's program of restoring unity did not stop with the redemption of His people. In fact, the words of Christ's high-priestly prayer were spoken as the next stage in the process was set into action, namely, to send God's people out to bring the great word of Christ's saving work to many others. "As Thou didst send Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18) — thus Jesus describes the process. Instead of His word "sending" we say "mission."

The work of mission, the process of bringing God's program into the world, locks two elements into close connection. One is that God's people tell the story of God's act in giving up His Son into death for the sins of the world. They tell it not simply to give information but to draw people into unity with themselves. The other element of the process of mission is that they are one with each other as they tell the story, "so that the world may know."

Our unity with each other as Christians is not simply a comfortable thing or a kindness in which we should indulge, but it is a part of the purpose for which God has us in the world, an essential element in bringing the Word which has unified us with God. When my automobile is in need of repair, I am attracted by the sign on a shop, "Automobile Repairs." But when inside I find that only wrecks are lying around on the floor and the partners, instead of repairing the wrecks, are engaged in fisticuffs with each other, I get out of there. God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ. He has given us the

Word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). That means that we have to be working together with one another in the great task.

Ephesians is the great epistle to stress that this work is to be done in combination with other Christians. God's work is done for a people, so that the people do their work in the plan of God.

In Him, according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory. In Him you also, who have heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and have believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory. (1:11-14)

The name in the New Testament for God's people working together in the extending of His call to the world is "church." In the original language the word means "the company of the calling out." The head of that company is Jesus Christ. God

has put all things under His feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (1:22)

We use the word "church" to denote a building in which we worship, or a group of people who gather in such a building, or a number of such congregations organized in a church denomination. For Saint Paul, just as our Lord had used the term in His sayings (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:15-20), the church is a gathering of people, small or large, who are committed to Him by faith and who sustain each other in faith through the forgiveness of sins.

B. The members of the church are like the components of the human body.

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (4:15-16)

The members of the church are like members of a body. As these members mature, they become knit together and function smoothly like the members of a mature human frame. The process by which this works we shall examine in detail in the third section of this study. Here we simply lift out St. Paul's word "truth." He uses it like a verb; he says that the members of the church are to "truth" each other. The word of truth, he had said before (1:13), is the Gospel of salvation, the good news that God has redeemed us through Jesus Christ and now keeps us in faith and love. When the members of the church "truth" each other, it means that they keep that good news coming to each other. For "truth" does not merely mean that it is factually true. It does mean that, but much more. It means that God's own faithful plan, which He conceived before He ever made the world, is coming true in His people as they share the good news of God's bringing it to pass in Christ. Thus Jesus told His disciples the night He was betrayed: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). That is the truth that He meant when He told Pilate: "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth

hears My voice" (John 18:37). God's people, the people of the church, keep that witness of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, completed on the cross, coming to each other.

The unity that holds the members of the church, the body of Christ, together is a unity of the Spirit, St. Paul says (Eph. 4:3). We who heard the Gospel of our salvation and the Word of truth were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13). St. Paul keeps on preaching the good news to people and prays that they may be "strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (3:16-17). The unity of the church is that "there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call" (4:4). Why this stress on the Holy Spirit as we face the meaning of the unity of the church?

One element in this stress is that God's people, the members of the church, are to do their work and to be bound together for each other from the inside out, through impulses of their inner selves, through "the inner man." Christian teachers have tried to express this fact by the doctrine of the invisible church. The church is not simply a political organization and its members are not held in line by penalties for breaking law. But God governs His people through His own Spirit in their inner selves, and His presence is renewed within them day by day. That is the reason for having them together in the holy Christian church: that they sustain each other through the renewal of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the breath of the body of Christ. No man has faith without Him; no man puts himself to work

for sustaining his brother Christian in faith without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3-13). As Jesus Christ commissions His followers for their work of mutual provision of the forgiveness of sins, He confers the Holy Spirit upon them. (John 20:21-22)

Another element in the importance of the Holy Spirit for the unity of the church lies in what the Spirit does. He does not influence the inner lives of God's people in unknown or mysterious ways. But His work, our Lord told His disciples, is to bear witness to Christ (John 15:26), to guide God's people into all truth by declaring to them what is Christ's (16:14). St. Paul therefore describes his own task of preaching the Gospel as based on insight and revelation given by the Spirit (Eph. 3:3), "how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." (3:6)

As we ponder the resources available to us for seeking the unity of the church, this remains central to our task. The Spirit is that resource, and He uses our efforts only as we help each other to see and to practice the meaning of Jesus Christ in our lives as our Redeemer and Lord. As agents of the Holy Spirit our pastors have to know nothing among us except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2-5, 12-13) if they would be conveyors of the Holy Spirit. As we share in the task of strengthening the unity of the church, we have to be at the business of "truthing" one another (4:15), causing the plan of God in Jesus Christ to come true in the lives of one another.

We are so accustomed to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to receive the Sac-

rament of His body and blood for the sake of our individual selves that we may miss the direction toward being one with one another. St. Paul summons the Ephesians to live lives worthy of the vocation with which they have been called (4:1). "Vocation" is the term that lies at the heart of the verb "called" and the words for "church," "the company of the calling out." It refers to God calling us by the great act in Jesus Christ, planned before the creation of the world, achieved through Christ's giving up His life on the cross, and brought to others through the functioning of the members of the holy Christian church. They have been called to be members of the body, so that they can pass that call on to one another and to their world. In that vocation, therefore, they are "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3)

St. Paul heaps up terms defining this unity. We can guess at his anxiety as we realize his struggle against the forces which were splitting the Christians to whom he was writing. "There is one body," he says; they are members of one organism, the body of Christ. "One Spirit" is at work in all of them; they are not driven and empowered by differing forces. They are called to "one hope"; they look forward to a release from the imperfections of this present world to be ushered, at the second coming of Christ, into higher responsibilities carried out with perfect love in an inheritance for which the Spirit is the guarantee (1:2-14). They have "one Lord," Jesus Christ, even now ruling with God over all things, mastering their impulses and protecting their faith through one and the same Spirit. They have "one

faith," for if it is indeed faith and not merely self-confidence or some other delusion, it is the confidence in God as Father through Jesus Christ, our Lord, which works actively in love for one another. There is "one baptism" through which they were all received into the kingdom of God's dear Son:

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (2:4-6; see also 5:26)

There is "one God and Father of all," the highest factor of unity, one in whom we are all created, one who has brought us together to guard and nurture us in His own family through Jesus Christ, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." (3:15)

Disunity between Christians is inappropriate, a sign that something vital is missing from their lives toward each other and from their inner selves. But above all, unity is important for every possible reason, for God Himself is at work through it and for it.

As we ponder the reasons for this unity and the purposes for it in the plan of God, we are ourselves coming under the richer power of the Holy Spirit. We are not simply reviewing some frequently read passages from the New Testament, but we are reviewing the act of God that put us into a tight and firm relation toward one another. St. John calls this relation "fellowship," more accurately "sharing" (1 John 1:3 ff.), and he says that we live in this relation as we tell each other the

great good work of God in Jesus Christ. St. Paul told Timothy that as he told this message he would save both others and himself (1 Tim. 4:16), and that is true, for this Word of God's Christ is not an idle thing, but it takes hold of us who tell it as well as those to whom we tell it.

C. We gain greater respect both for the unity between Christians and the act of God in Christ communicated and shared by the Gospel when we see the chasms between people which this unity and the Gospel which works it bridge and repair.

The great breach which must be repaired is that between ourselves and God. In Ephesians St. Paul calls that gap simply death. The human being can be physically very much alive, but if God is not the drive of his inner life, it were better that he had not been born. St. Paul sees every human being by nature in that plight, and it is God's act that men are given life and unity with God in Christ.

You He made alive when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. (2:1-5)

But the same process that brings men back into unity with God brings them back into unity with each other. In Ephesians the outstanding gap between people is that between Jew and Gentile, and the entire letter has as a purpose the repair of

that breach. It sets forth the fact that the Gentiles "are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel." (3:6)

The second chapter goes to considerable length to dramatize this gap and its repair.

At one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands — remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (2:11-18)

The Israeli-Arab confrontation and the outbreaks of anti-Semitism recurring all over the world in the two millennia since St. Paul attest to the toughness of the problem of racial hostility. In our time we can add many other varieties to the list. Our Lord faced the problem head-on in His own ministry, spoke with help and concern to Samaritans (Luke 17:16-19; John 4:7-42), made a Samaritan the exemplar of neighborly love (Luke 10:33-37), and caused a Gentile woman to be the shining example of faith to His disciples (Matt. 15:22). Doubly distressing is the specter

of prejudice when it menaces the fellowship of professing Christians. The early church in Jerusalem moved promptly to thwart it. (Acts 6:1-7)

St. Paul operates with no merely psychological or sociological methods. He exalts the plan of God which He carried out according to His own purpose to make men one: the atoning work of Jesus Christ, held before people by every operation of the Gospel. This is far above any human power. It attacks the demonic forces which are arrayed against the rule of God in the human heart. For Christ's work is God's way of moving us from the dominion of Satan to the kingdom of Christ (see Col. 1:13). The unity of the church gathers Christians together into a group which stands arrayed against the dark forces and enables its partners to cultivate the practice of mutual love.

Lest we might imagine St. Paul to operate only in the most general and lofty dimensions, he directs himself to the simplest human relations in which people find themselves torn apart, the situations of the family. Especially in the Gentile world attitudes of men to their spouses were far from wholesome, and the chances of permanence in the marriage relationship were poor. Already then, furthermore, the age gap between parents and children was proverbial. St. Paul develops the pattern of Christian marriage in a unique way, for he makes an all-out parallel between the Christian husband and Christian wife on the one hand and between Christ and the church on the other. They stand mutually to each other in the relation of self-sacrificing care and loyal service. The principle that makes this lofty ideal possible is the church:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:31-32)

St. Paul feels that the Gospel call that has brought these two people into unity with God becomes the factor that keeps them in fruitful unity toward one another.

St. Paul has a good word for parents too: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (6:1-4)

This is the opposite of "laying down the law." He recommends the same kind of nurture for holding members of the family with Christ and His redeeming work that he himself is trying to employ toward his readers in this letter.

A direct linking of oneness with God and oneness with the fellow Christian is set forth in the relationship that could so easily degenerate into cruelty and heartlessness, that of slave owner and slave.

Masters, do the same to them [that is, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men], and forbear threatening, knowing that He who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with Him. (6:9)

Ephesians thus sets out the process of Christian unity in a comprehensive and realistic way. It does not merely hold up magnificent ideals, a utopia of good will which is beyond the reach of ordinary people, an escape from the world of hard facts. It operates altogether with the prin-

principle that to belong to the company of God's people the human being has to be struck, and to keep on being struck, by the call of God. That is His invitation, backed up by the death and resurrection of Christ, to turn away from the old world and life of catering to our own sinful appetites and to enter into the new relationship with God through which the barriers between men and men also are pulled aside. It operates altogether from the principle that to be a member of a unified people and an agent of that unity the Holy Spirit of God has to be at work in the person, and that happens only as the Spirit is holding the redeeming work of Jesus Christ before us. St. Paul plants that process in the middle of the nurture of marital love:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might consecrate her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that the church might be presented before Him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (5: 25-27)

As the Gospel of Jesus Christ proceeds to the world from the unified company of God's people, new units are added to it. The church is not just a statistic, but a growing organism. St. Paul links the pictures of a body and a building to describe this process, and he does so in order to stress that each new member needs to be welded into a unity with all the others. Jesus

came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but

you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (2:17-22)

As the church grows and receives new members, it needs always to be one. God's people have to be one family (3:15); they need to be one living body of Christ with each individual a functioning member in it; they need to be one building, each unit a living stone (1 Peter 2:5) which keeps on growing into a holy temple of God and a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Thus the three persons of the Holy Trinity are united in the tasks of the church of God on earth and in the giving of its unity, so that its people may function as one in the task of bringing the Gospel of God to each other and to their world.

St. Paul puts it interestingly to the Philippians:

God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the Word of life. (Phil. 2:13-15)

II. MAN FRACTURES UNITY

God proposes to carry out His plan for the rescue and life of the world through His people, the people of the church. Whether those people are only two in one place, a Christian husband and wife, or

whether they are twenty or two hundred or two thousand in a Christian congregation at work in a community, or two million in a church denomination or synod, in God's plan they are to work as one, as members of one body, the body of Christ.

Common sense will already indicate how important this principle is. When I was a young minister to a tiny mission congregation in an older part of St. Louis I had the sensation that my church was like a sandbar in the Mississippi, building up at the upstream end but washing away downstream. Our workers in the mission fields rejoice in accessions of individuals and families but deplore the few years of the average duration of church membership.

What makes this erosion such a bitter problem? On the mission field where Christians are so tiny a minority it is easy to see the social pressures that thwart and endanger membership. In New Guinea our missionaries have tried to bring entire communities and clans into the church at one time in order to reduce this pressure of unbelief. But how does that pressure work? Why is it so true that "once a believer, not always a believer"? As we face the forces that tend to fragment the church and hamper its unity, we shall be better able to plot the course of improvement and protection and to appreciate the program which St. Paul sets out to the Ephesians for it.

A. When God moves a person into the body of His people, He effects a change which is not just statistical. He doesn't merely give a person a new name in Holy Baptism, but He has to change that person who is made up of inner impulses and

concerns and an outward mode of life. St. Paul describes the change:

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24)

St. Paul says that life from which we have been turned is one "in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind" (2:3). These forces are a part of ourselves. When we are turned from unbelief to faith, we do not put aside the natural hungers of our bodies. We continue to want food and drink, to be moved by the instincts of reproduction and survival. These are closely related to our enjoyment of sight and sound and smell and seem very much a natural part of ourselves. They involve the enjoyment of gifts of God, and we bring them before God in our prayers of thanksgiving day by day.

What, then, makes these natural hungers disruptive of the unity of the church? We can tell where they pass the limit of enjoyment and become harmful; but what does that have to do with the unity of the church? The answer is that our bodily and mental and nervous processes are the proving ground for our personalities. The fabric that holds the church together is the impulse of love, of mutual care and concern, which is God's gift to His people through Jesus Christ. As we share beautiful things with one another and provide food and drink and clothing for one another, the unity of the church is in evidence. But when the natural hungers get turned back into self-indulgence, that unity

is in trouble. For example: "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (5:18). We can see this process at work in the life of the family, where the hungers of sex and survival may outweigh mutual concern and sharing.

Farther under the surface are the impulses that surround racial prejudice, like that which separated Jewish and Gentile Christians. Many a person has been taught to harbor such prejudice because it enhances his own pride. He feels that he is a greater person because he can count somebody else as lesser. When this is supported by generations of practice and example, a real barrier is set up, a "dividing wall of hostility." (2:14)

At the bottom of this problem is what is now being called a style of life. The old nature infiltrates thought and mood and speech. It stands out, therefore, in considerable contrast to the practices which mark the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor silly talk nor levity, which are not fitting, but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (5:3-5)

The covering principle is the contrast between love and selfishness. Love is the glue of the church. Selfishness breaks it up.

B. St. Paul is realistic when he analyzes the forces that disrupt the unity of the church as a part of the culture in which we live. We are converts from the world, he would say, and by "world" he does not

mean simply the created universe, but he means the company and community of people who are without God. Along with the Lord Jesus he terms it "Gentile," and for him that is more than non-Jewish, for it means the way of life that is without the Spirit of God.

This way of life is a way of behavior, a "walk" (2:2). It is a way of life that is followed not only by people who lack certain religious observances like circumcision but also by people who are separated from Christ (2:11-12). It is the mark of the culture of the unconverted that they have nothing more than their body and their nervous system. They do "what comes naturally." Our time finds it easy to use the principle of freedom to justify certain practices, particularly in the domain of sex, which the discipline of previous generations had regarded as shameful. Saint Paul calls this "fulfilling the desires of body and mind" (2:3). There is no other rule; why not? There are no other impulses; why not?

You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus. (4:17-21)

The terms St. Paul employs describe feelings and practices that arise from being cut off from God. The only standards which govern conduct are the unbridled catering to natural impulses. The epistle gives a most apt description of paganism

at the time of St. Paul. But it is also remarkably precise as a description of the false freedom, the licentiousness and drift, of our own time.

At once we of the church must realize how powerful the impulses and the style of life of the surrounding world are on our own community. That power comes not merely from our proximity, from the fact that we live with the people of a pagan culture. The proximity is bad enough. But the problem is more than proximity.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. (5:6-13)

The Christian and the member of the body of Christ is under constant summons to share the darkness, to make common cause with the ways of self-indulgence, selfishness, false liberty.

The Christian is apt to imagine that he is observing simply some changes in the customs of morality. He hears reproach of an older generation for being Puritan and legalistic. It is noteworthy that St. Paul does not fall into this trap as he discusses the problems fragmenting the church. He does not attack libertarianism and license by quoting rules from the Bible or other-

wise. He does not say that we should not commit fornication because we have known the commandment we call the sixth of the Decalog. But he says, "You did not so learn Christ!" (4:20). He is speaking not just of rules that we have learned to be the will of God and that we are to keep even if we do not feel like it. But he is speaking of a way of life that involves the turning of our heart from the indulgence of the flesh to the service of one another and which has come about because we have found that Jesus Christ died and rose again so that our inner selves be different and we be incorporated into the new program of life that is God's way. (4:21-24)

The Christian is also apt to imagine that we are discussing problems of personal morality which really have nothing to do with the unity of the church. We like to shrink the dimensions of that disunity to disputes about Christian doctrines. They are hugely significant, and we face that problem too. But everything that sets the minds of Christians into tracks apart from each other is disruptive of that unity. Note how St. Paul puts ordinary courtesy in speech, the ability to keep one's temper, the matter of ethics in business practices, into the context of the Christian's care for his brother, and therefore how important it is to turn from the Gentile way:

Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths,

but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (4:25-32)

As we reflect on the culture of our time mirrored in a day's and evening's television programs that invade the living rooms of our families, we see how our minds are infiltrated; how smoothly the tempers of our inner selves are shaped by the simple processes of business and advertising and politics; how easily the readiness to snarl, the skill in putting self first and the language of demand are given places in the processes of the family and of the church. Part of the Gentile mind is that it does not have a conscience about the fracturing of human relations. The Christian is able to have a bad conscience about harm done to the next person and to feel himself guilty for infringing on the next person's due. But our time, like that of the apostle's, may too easily blunt the senses of the Christian toward the manner in which he turns away from his fellow Christian just when there is most need for preserving the unity of the church, just when he has to be of help in preserving his fellow Christian's faith. How easy it is to demand purity and forgiveness from the brother; how hard it is to bring the power for that purity and to bring that forgiveness in Christ to him in an age that puts the premium on getting one's due and doing one's thing!

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved

children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (5:1-2)

This is the program of life that God has put us into, that we have to foster among one another. Its disruption we have to forestall at all costs.

C. As we scan the lines of St. Paul's great tract on Christian unity, we find him analyzing some problems that we might call the occupational diseases just of Christians. He does not accuse his Christian hearers of being heathen. But he sensitizes them to the Gentile way that surrounds them and with which they are well acquainted. Some of the qualities and practices of self-centeredness and surrender to lust that characterize the Gentile become a procedure of Christians as they consciously try to be Christian, while actually surrendering to impulses not guided by the Holy Spirit. As we in our time struggle through the problems of unity between denominations or synods, and as we face fragmentation all the way into our families, we sense some of these processes of division at work.

Behind the admonitions to overcome racial prejudice that was splintering the Christian churches we see processes at work that are repeatable in our own situation. The Jewish Christian felt himself apart from the Gentile Christian because he had a lingering reliance on the ceremonies and institutions of his former religion. His pride of a special covenant relation with God was touched as he was asked to share it with people who were newcomers to his community of worship. By the same token the newcomers felt like second-class citizens. Their official name was "stranger." They were told that they

were no longer alienated from God, but they found themselves aliens from their fellow believers. The anxieties of the Greek Christians in the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1) were duplicated in the churches to whom Paul wrote.

The congregations of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod in the founding years were socially unified because of a common occupation, chiefly farming, and a common language that was almost a refuge from the surrounding world, German. As generations march on and our church becomes a cross section of American society, a problem arises for many who have been with the church for a long time. They are tempted to identify their faith with their practices of piety, to sense a distinction between themselves and the people who have not labored as long or as liberally as they have for the good of their churches. They are apt to echo Peter's question: "Lord, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?" (Matt. 19:27). They feel troubled by changes in taste of church buildings and equipment, of worship orders and practices, of modes of sociability and celebration especially of the young. The newcomers, on the other hand, are apt to regard change as of the essence of their faith and worship and to surrender to the folkways of amusement and entertainment as essential to functions of worship.

The problem of the gap between groups in the church — ethnic and racial, economic, age, conservative versus progressive — is always double. The people on one side of the gap imagine that the problem is only theirs, and that offense is chargeable to the other side. But the other side senses the judgment and resents it. This is

why St. Paul views the solution to these problems never merely as agreement, but he terms it peace, for the basic problem is mutual hostility and not just difference. Disunity is not agreement to disagree, but it is warfare, cold or hot.

Many of the practices against which Ephesians warns are those of people at war, and it is noteworthy that frequently the point is made to avoid them especially toward brother Christians. The "former manner of life" still needs concern of Christians, now in relation toward fellow Christians (4:25-32); notice especially bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander. These ruptures of unity menace the character of the worker for unity: lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing one another in love (4:2). The Christian who is conscious of not receiving the recognition for his faith that he should, or who is censorious about the wrongs of character or doctrine of another, may feel himself particularly qualified to express harsh judgments, to indicate his concern for perfection, and to feel that zeal for the truth may even outweigh inaccuracy of his charges.

The followers of Luther have often felt impelled to imitate not only his passion for the truth of Scripture or the meaning of justification by faith, but his violent invective. Our church has a long history of doctrinal debate. It has at times been identified as a quest for the unity of the church. It is important to examine to what extent this is valid.

We shall discuss at greater length Saint Paul's description of the service which every Christian should render to another as he edifies the body of Christ, namely,

to "speak the truth in love" (4:15). Saint Paul describes the purpose of this process:

That we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. (4:14)

Sometimes men have assumed that the chief task is to attack the evil wind of doctrine and the cunning of men who perpetrate it. The marking of false teaching is of prime importance indeed. "Take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them," Saint Paul tells the Romans (16:17). That evil doctrine is not always heretical teaching; sometimes it operates with painstakingly Biblical and Confessional accuracy, but its purpose is to pull Christians away from Christians.

But St. Paul makes clear that the Christian's service to his brother is not simply to mark error or division making, but through "truthing" (4:16) to help his brother Christian from falling immaturely into the trap of the false teaching. The power for unity is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not just the law of denunciation.

Therewith, however, we have touched a most vital malady in the problem of the unity of the church. That is that Christians withdraw from those who are in danger of false doctrine. Our church has put a useful hedge about its teaching in the principle of pulpit and altar fellowship; the Word is to be preached purely, the sacraments are to be administered as Christ constituted them. But I may take occasion thereby to cut myself off completely from fellow Christians who are in

need of my help. My underlying assumption is often that everyone who teaches differently from me is wrong, or that everyone who teaches differently from me is responsible for his own error and is a division maker. On that basis St. Paul, admonishing the Galatians for their lapse into the Judaizing error, was wrong in writing the letter to them at all.

Possibly this procedure is in reaction to another damage which can be done to the cause of Christian unity. That is permissiveness or toleration of falsehood, whether it be of behavior or of teaching. Many an honest Christian feels himself badly qualified to reprove another for a failing because of his own imperfections. He assumes that correction of false teaching is the theologian's business. Or he is otherwise hesitant to produce ill will. Our Lord counseled to move promptly upon a failure known to ourselves in another person (Matt. 18:15-20), but to do so with the forgiveness of sins and with the help of others where necessary. St. Paul gave a similar counsel to the Galatians: move in to restore, do so aware of your own shortcomings, do so for the sake of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 6:1-2)

Permissiveness toward false teaching is just as great a damage to unity as censoriousness and rejection; but that does not make them the alternatives. Rejecting a person means surrender to disunity. The original meaning in the New Testament of the word "heresy" was division (1 Cor. 1:10), and it had to be cured by being "united in the same mind and the same judgment." St. John complained bitterly of the temperament of Diotrephes,

who likes to put himself first. . . . He refuses himself to welcome the brethren,

and also stops those who want to welcome them and put them out of the church. (3 John 9-10)

The teaching of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod concerning church fellowship has been salutary in preserving a uniformity of confession and teaching. But Ephesians describes the importance of what must contribute to that ultimate

unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. (4:13-14)

It is a ministry, a mutual provision of the Word that edifies, a "truthing" with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that does not simply sketch the boundaries of right and wrong doctrine, but that changes the heart by the dynamic of the Gospel of Christ.

A significant era in the history of the Missouri Synod was the period of the open conferences called by C. F. W. Walther to discuss the meaning of the great teachings of the Lutheran Church. Strange diversities in doctrinal position occurred in them, and the barrier to wider participation was the inability to talk German rather than the subscription to identical formulations of doctrine. With the years and the rapid growth of our church came a fear that the boundaries of truth were in danger, and the formula arose that in order to enjoy fellowship in prayer and Word and Sacrament there had to be complete doctrinal uniformity in every particular. Agreement in doctrine was made essential for church fellowship. But Ephesians 4 places these steps in reverse order. Fellowship, the

ample exchange of Law and Gospel through the Word, the reception of the Sacrament by all who properly discern the Lord's body, is the requisite for unity in doctrine and life.

An especially grave disaster has been the assumption that carrying on doctrinal discussion and establishing doctrinal norms must be the prerogative of sophisticated theologians. The result has been doctrinal debate on a learned and sometimes incomprehensible plane. St. Paul warns Timothy against this process, especially when it departs from the core of God's love in the Gospel.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. Certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the Law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions. (1 Tim. 1:5-7)

Teach and urge these duties. If one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Tim. 6:2-5)

Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. (2 Tim. 2:23-24)

The ministry by which false teaching

is to be overcome and the victims of false teaching are to be helped is to be the ministry of all Christians. Their teachers and theologians are to help them in the process. But a prime source of the fragmentation of the church is the cleavage between the theologians of the church and the lay people in the business of establishing Christian unity.

Again let us make it clear: the truth of the Gospel, the authority of the Bible, the meaning of the Christian church are vital and essential positions for every Christian to agree on. Three years ago these were the areas which The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and The American Lutheran Church agreed on as vital for church fellowship. By this they did not mean that the other doctrines were unnecessary or that people might be permissive about error in them. But they meant that when those are the bases of church fellowship, then Christians are getting busy to carry out the essential tasks of Christian unity, for then they are taking up the business of speaking to one another in love and in meekness.

Threats of the fragmentation of the church are not a small matter. Those who contribute to them are not serving the Lord Christ, but their own self-interest (Rom. 16:17-18). The heavenly Father needs the unity of His people in His design for them. Disagreement concerning the teachings of the Christian religion are serious impediments to this unity. But even more hampering is the unwillingness to confer and to help; and still more disastrous to the cause of unity are "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander" (4:32), which seal off disagreeing parties from one another. This is as true of the most

prestigious summit conference on Christian doctrine as it is of a family feud in the corner of a parish.

III. THE CHURCH PRESERVES UNITY

God gives the unity of the Christian church, but He has to give it and maintain it over and over again, for forces opposed to the design of God gnaw at the unity of the church, set its people against one another, weaken their witness to the unbelieving world, frustrate God's purpose in making His people one with Him and with each other. When God made the world, He spoke the Word and it was there. When God redeemed the world, He went to the tremendous expense of the incarnation, suffering, and death of His own Son. When God proposes to preserve the unity of the church, again He speaks no automatic word, but He makes the people who are in the danger of breaking away from each other to be the agents and helpers of the unity which He gives.

A. Ephesians makes the labor of Christians for the unity of the church quite explicit. God gives them special gifts

for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working

properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love. (4:12-16)

The words with which St. Paul describes this ministry are used for the daily labor of the helper in the household: service, maintenance, housekeeping. It is a job that is never done. This is one reason for the recurrence of one quality in the equipment of God's people for their ministry: patience. They have to stay at it even when met with rebuffs and frustration. But more, they cannot afford ever to imagine their work to be finished. St. Paul tells the Ephesians that the calling of the Christian is to be carried on "with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (4:1-3)

The mutual care of Christians for preserving their unity is so important because they need each other for the preservation of their faith and of their place in the body of Christ. Their service to one another is not simply kindness in general. But it is the building up of the body of Christ (4:12). They are members in that body. Each one has tasks to perform for which the Holy Spirit has specially recruited him (note the lists in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12). All these tasks are for the sake of the building up of this body (1 Cor. 12:14-26; 14:26). All the things that Christians do for one another are in some way to help them grow up into Christ, to be more closely connected with Him in faith, to be more evidently like Him in their love and self-sacrifice. They become joints and ligaments to one another by which they are bound together in a working organism.

St. Paul's picture of the human body as

an analogy of the church sounds useful and optimistic until we realize that there are many forces which resist that unity and spoil the working together of Christians in the church. The service of Christians toward one another resists those forces too. Christians help each other not simply to give in to the forces of the culture around us or the impulses of the fleshly life within us. They ward off the influence of faulty teaching about Jesus Christ or the apathy to have no concern about any teaching at all.

At the heart of the mutual ministry of Christians to each other, and this begins in their households and goes on through all of the activities of a Christian parish and carries through the simple relations of friend to friend, is that they "truth" one another (4:15). Bible translations usually say "speak the truth," for it is hard to imagine what else to do with truth than to say it in words. Let us not belittle the words. Through them our Lord was able to set up in people's minds the process by which He came to restore the kingdom of God in their hearts. Through words He could help men confront the poverty of their material lives and the tragedy of their wandering astray from the way of God. Through words He could point to the sacrifice which He would give of Himself on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. St. Paul says that it is a pity when Christians misuse the gift of speech for slander or dirty jokes, and he says that it must grieve the Holy Spirit, who plans that Christians speak with words to one another about God's love in Jesus Christ. (4:29-32)

The church sets up special opportunities for talking to one another and communi-

cating the truth of God in Christ. Often these groups, like Bible classes or interest groups or men's and women's and youth groups, lose their vitality because the talk becomes the business of just a few people like the leader or several seasoned veterans. Or it fails to be the concern that is important; it centers on doctrines or facts that are not the important matters of the life of the people present. How wonderful when the people in a Bible class one by one can say, "Now this is what I find these words meaning to me."

More important yet: the conversation of Christians two by two or in a special group becomes genuinely grand when they talk to each other about Jesus Christ and what He means to them. Perhaps they have more questions about Him than they have answers, but they are on their way. For then you will have talk that binds people together instead of splitting them apart in debate and faultfinding and gossip and suspicion. It does not help people in need to complain about people who are not present. But it puts them together in a program of mutual care and concern when they can talk to each other about Jesus Christ, their Lord and healer, and His gifts to them of help for their lives.

Notice that St. Paul in this epistle is equally concerned about how Christians talk to each other one by one and about their common worship. For the test of unity is there as much as in the large group and in the denomination. Christian unity can be fostered by two businessmen having lunch together, by two housewives over morning coffee, by two teen-agers sharing the interests of school and sport. What are they talking about? Are they able to turn to the goodness of God in

Jesus Christ as an answer to their chief problems? When they do so, then the unity of the church is in action.

But there are other ways by which Christians can build each other up in the body of Christ beside talking.

Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (5:18-20)

What is important, as we build up our fellow Christian, is that we really "truth" him, get him to think with us in mind and heart about God's great work to us in Jesus Christ. We don't have to make formal speeches about Him, but He can be a part of the thanksgivings that we speak over food and the prayers that we pray for safety. In the lives of Christians a continual and joyful process is their worship together in which they sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. St. Paul is not thinking only about what we call church services; it ought to be possible to do this singing in the household. We don't need the accompaniment of the organ or the piano, and the vogue of guitars can well take hold in the family as we join in songs of praise to our Lord.

But in all of this remember what we are doing: we are "truthing." We are not simply saying true things or remembering facts, but we are reaching back into the heart of God and remembering how He has kept His Word to the world by giving His Son for our sins and as our Lord. We are not simply announcing or reminding of this fact, but St. Paul's verb suggests that we are rubbing it in, we are applying it

to one another as a medicine or an ointment, we are causing it to come true in one another. We acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord; when we "truth" Him to one another we are helping His rule and lordship to reach more fully over one another.

Christians do this as they worship with one another. As they sit under the preaching of their pastors they are not merely listening, but they are applying the words which he is speaking to one another. They are doing this directly as they join in the psalmody and hymnody of the service and particularly as they share the body and blood of their Lord in the Sacrament, which they do "discerning the Lord's body." (1 Cor. 11:29)

To make this program for maintaining the unity of the church work, its members have to realize that they have to stay at it and not stop. They have to be "eager." Just to think that unity is a good idea, to give it a try but be pretty sure that it won't work, is not enough. "The Greek word conveys . . . the idea of zealous effort and care. . . . RV 'giving diligence,' or NEB 'spare no effort' are preferable renderings."²

But this means that the Christian at work maintaining the unity of the Spirit has to keep himself in trim. He has to overcome hostility, pride, face-saving, impatience, resentment. He has to see that underneath his efforts is love for the Christian brother, which is the gift to him of his Lord who loved him first. (5:21)

B. The demands which Jesus Christ makes on the members of His body in order to maintain its unity are strenuous. His help for the task is set forth by St.

Paul along two lines, both of which we recognize to be at work among us right now: all Christians are ministers to each other; some are special helpers to the rest.

When St. Paul first makes that imperative, "be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," he at once assures "grace given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (4:7). Grace means the gift of God. Basic is the gift of the Holy Spirit in the heart of each one of us. But the Holy Spirit makes use of Christians in different ways, carrying out various phases of the task and with differing abilities. Quite a panorama of these tasks and abilities is described by St. Paul in both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

In Ephesians St. Paul draws attention at once to one set of gifted people who are the helpers of Christians in their task of maintaining the unity of the church. These men who are the special helpers are the gift of the ascended Christ, who first came down into our world in order to redeem us and then took charge of the management of the universe (4:9-10). St. Paul lists himself among them: apostles, evangelists (that means special preachers of the Gospel), prophets (men with special revelations for the early church), and pastors and teachers, two designations for one and the same office. St. Paul sees every Christian involved in the task of keeping the church unified, every Christian with some gift to expend in that task. But he points to pastors and teachers, and we have them today in the same way, as direct agents of Jesus Christ in the task. Sometimes a cleavage arises between the clergy and the laity; sometimes the former think of themselves as inhabiting a prestige and

² Foulkes, p. 110.

a dignity. But in Christ's plan they are special servants to servants, helpers in the task of maintaining the unity of the church.

St. Paul's grammar had made a close connection between the ministry of all Christians and the growing ultimate unity of the faith toward which they are to work. An equally close connection is made between the pastor and teacher and the contribution he makes to the ministry of the church as a whole. He is to keep on equipping its members for their mutual ministry. He is a starter, a playing coach. He is to help the members of the body of Christ do their work together, and that makes him a masseur and a trainer. As he preaches, his people hear how they are going to be doing it for each other. As he guides the structures and organizations of the parish the people do not merely watch him, but he is the supervisor — "bishop" the New Testament calls him — of how they themselves are doing the task. (1 Tim. 3:1 ff.)

This obviously places a strong demand on the manner in which pastor and people relate to each other. Everything that we have said about the approachability, mutual acceptance, kindness, gentleness, and patience of Christian toward Christian applies with special force to the relation between pastor and people.

Ephesians is an especially useful letter for pastors, for it holds up a case study of a man with a pastoral heart going about his task of equipping and heartening people for maintaining unity among themselves. We have other illustrations of this, such as the Letter to the Philippians and the so-called pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus. But Ephesians is especially

helpful because St. Paul shows himself unashamedly at prayer for his people, and he makes clear what the priorities in his thinking for them are.

Foremost in his thinking toward them is the recurrent theme of his joy that he is preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them, "how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel." (3:6)

Like St. Paul, the pastor and teacher of the church today is filled with amazement that God should choose him to be an agent for bringing people into the company of His people and to help them work together to be the most powerful thing in the universe.

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to His eternal purpose which He has realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in Him. (3:8-12)

Like St. Paul, the pastor and teacher of the church today keeps on praying and working for his people, and he says with him daily:

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being

rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (3:14-19)

Where pastors and teachers of the church are working and praying with those objectives at the top, the church will be at one, whether two by two as in the family, dozens and scores and hundreds in the congregations, or thousands and millions in the communities and denominations of Christendom.

C. St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians makes tremendous demands on Christians as it asks them eagerly to seek the unity of the church. It does so with no false optimism. It promises no easy tasks for the pastors and the people. St. Paul frankly admits the conflict in the world that is there not merely because of the new life in the hearts of Christians and the old unregenerate self that still lurks inside of them and is supported by the ways of life of unconverted people round about them. St. Paul wrote from the point of view of a man living in a crowded urban environment very much like that in which we are living today. He was not fooling himself. But he knew that around and over all of the difficulties which Christians faced in their time was the power of the adversary of God, Satan himself. He is the coordinator of evil. We need not be surprised that our world seems to fall apart, or that right within the church of God forces of dissension rear their head.

That is what makes Ephesians so valuable for us all. Of us, too, it can be said:

We are not contending against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against

the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. (6:12)

Of importance to us is the view of Saint Paul that these powers are not necessarily our conquerors, that the division and breakdown in the church which they engineer can be repaired and they can be vanquished. Christ is their Maker (Col. 1:16), and those which have come under the leadership of the opponent of God have already been defeated by Him through His cross (Col. 2:15). Now is the mop-up operation, now is the last campaign in which these powers certainly go to their end. It is for us, the members of the church and the body of Christ, to play our role under our lordly Leader.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpower us.

The Word they still shall let remain
And not a thank have for it.
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.

St. Paul describes the part that Christ's members play in this warfare in terms that are worthy of the battle in which we have to engage. He likens the church's preparation for its task to the putting on of armor, but he does it through a remarkable analogy. The armor of the ancient soldier was very heavy. He needed help to put it on. And so the spectacle which the apostle sets before us to describe the preparations of the church eager to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is that of the armory or the bivouac before the battalion sets out for the conflict. It is a sobering thought that as Christians arm themselves for the struggle for unity, they have

to be sufficiently one with each other to help each other. We cannot hypnotize each other into unity. We cannot merely make brave noises about it or piously complain when it is not there. But we have to help each other to own and to use the materials necessary for the campaign. The soldier fights well not just when he knows what the armor is or when he can give it the right name or when he can chide those who do not wear it or fight in it. But he has to put it on, and he has to be helped to put it on. That is the business of the church of God, to brace its people for the warfare of God and send them forth equipped for the fray.

Therefore, take the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the equipment of the Gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (6:13-17)

The girdle that holds the armament together is the truth; as in 4:15, where it is God's own faithfulness applied by every Christian to every other one, the truth is God's act in causing His plan of atonement with Himself to come true in Jesus Christ. That has to be put on, person to person, so that the church is a company reminding one another continually who they are. The central act of the truth is that through Jesus Christ, His cross, His resurrection, we have the forgiveness of sins and we can convey that to one another in the continual guarantee of God's favor

and goodness, the continual supply of God's gift for our task and responsibility to carry it out. Why are church members so silent about God in Christ to their world? Why are their conversations muffled or disfigured with argument rather than care for one another? Because they are not taking the prayer of our Lord seriously as they say it: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

"Stand therefore . . . having put on the breastplate of righteousness" (6:14). Righteousness is God's favor. When that covers our hearts from harm, we can bravely confront the attacks of our time. But we have to keep putting it on. This does not suggest that our righteousness and God's favor are by works. But it does suggest that we need continually to turn to it, to seek it, our Lord would say (Matt. 6:33); and as Christians we find it in the constantly repeated and impressed story of His suffering and death, which takes us anew to God's heart and welds us firmly into God's company and makes us working units of His campaign to the world.

"Stand therefore . . . having shod your feet with the equipment of the Gospel of peace" (6:15). This phrase shows that St. Paul is thinking not merely of the business of talking and listening as we put on the armor of God, but of sharing and mutually helping. The Gospel must walk—in the shoes of people. It must be proclaimed—by the witness of Christ's people displaying such love to men that they are with them, close enough to look into their eyes and reach them with their hands. As Christians hear the Gospel from their pulpits, they must want to speak it to one another and to walk out of their churches

into their families and their world to keep the Gospel going. And remember what the Gospel is: It is never less than the good news that in Jesus Christ, particularly in His death and resurrection, the heavenly Father has given us life with Him forever and love in our hearts to go and share that life with one another and our world.

"Above all take the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one" (6:16). The flaming arrow was the projectile of the ancient army, bringing death from a distance right out of the air. In modern language we would look for an antiballistic missile. But Saint Paul suggests a shield that will put the fire out: faith. That is a much stronger word than our feeble counterpart of trust, trust in most anything beginning with ourselves. In this letter St. Paul uses "faith" to describe the right hold on the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It is the product of the Word of truth and the Gospel of our salvation (1:13). It is coupled with love to all the saints (1:15, 19). It is the accepting, with a firm hand which God Himself works, of the grace and gift of God that rescues us through Jesus Christ (2:8), the gift of the Spirit of God by which Christ Himself lives in our hearts (3:17). It is therefore one of the many links and bonds of the unity of Christians with each other (4:4, 13). Through faith the Christian actually has the power of God Himself as his defender against whatever attack the evil one can muster against him.

"Take the helmet of salvation" (6:17). St. Paul frequently uses "salvation" in the sense of our final rescue and thus gives it the sense of a thing hoped for (1 Thess. 5:8). The helmet shields the brain, it protects the certainty that God is not leaving

us, but for Christ's sake stays with us to the end and keeps us together at Christ's business.

"Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (6:17). We associate the Sacred Scriptures with the term "Word of God." Indeed they convey God's life and love to us because He has given them. But the Scriptures themselves save the term "Word of God" for the way in which God Himself works in the human heart, and His Word is first and last Jesus Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit is the agent in our hearts that keeps us remembering what Jesus said and did (John 14:26). As we speak of that work of Christ to one another, we are wielding the weapon by which the Spirit successfully combats apathy and waywardness not only in our own heart but in one another.

St. Paul urges us to pray at all times, led by that same Spirit, and with all patience, for one another (6:18), so that we and our leaders might continue unafraid to "proclaim the mystery of the Gospel" (6:19). For in that way we remember to call upon the love of God to protect and also to share that love for the protection of each other.

California was settled a century ago by wagon trains of travelers. By night they put their wagons in a circle for mutual protection and comforted each other at their common campfires. By day they thrust out into the unknown land, and we honor their perseverance. They did it for a human home. We bind ourselves together through a higher power and for a greater purpose. Let us continue to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (4:3)

St. Louis, Mo.