

UNITY OF ACTION IN THE CHURCH
The Spirit of Contention Condemned By Paul as Carnal
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And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. — Matt. xiv, 16-18

The social nature is one of our strong attributes. The use of it brings progression. The child develops according to the degree of association. The artisan, the student, the statesman, and the Christian,— all owe much to association. We all assent to one Central Power governing the Universe, displaying the law of harmony. Harmony is in all our functions of mind and body regulating the system and making our inherent forces effective.

Expression is given to this fact when God according to the Scripture record ordered chaos into unity. He sanctioned the worship of one Creator, obedience to one authority, which being forsaken, brought disorder and sorrow at an early age, and has continued. Hope was given in the promise of a Redeemer which was recognized in the different ages. Job mentions the promise in his book written before any other book of the Bible, and it is the oldest literary production in the world. Its time is placed 29 years before the Exodus from Egypt, 1520 years before Christ, 530 years before Homer, 1000 years before Confucius and Solon. David refers to the promise in his Psalm about 1000 years before Christ, Isaiah about 700 years B.C., and other prophets speak of the same promise.

Moses foretold him and impressed the importance of hearing him. He is called the Restorer of paths to dwell in.

The term church is not used in the Old Testament. Our Saviour said he will build it. To build a structure requires a foundation. His doctrine of regeneration is the basis, which means the subjugation of our carnal nature, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to endow us with the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. Where God's love is there is peace. Consequently about 5000 persons in the beginning church, when they had received the Holy Ghost, "were of one heart and one soul." The Saviour says, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; that by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." He prays for His disciples, "that they may be made perfect in one, that the world may know that thou hast sent me." He calls His followers a kingdom and says, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." Testimonies of this kind are many. Membership in the church will not save us, for to be saved requires a spiritual birth produced by desire; but the church is a system of help. It is said, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about 3000 souls."

Baptism is a confession of faith and a ceremony of admission into the fellowship of the church, and implies agreement with every member of the church in all duties resting on that sacred relation for which Christ gave himself. It means submission to the Head of the church in all things, co-operation with the members, the upholding of the spiritual and natural wants of the church, the maintenance of discipline to provoke to love and good works, the reproof of such as become lax in duty, that the "Body of Christ," may work out all the ends promotive of righteousness. Neither edification nor purity can be maintained without unity of action. A united ministry is necessary to enforce discipline, and the deference from the members to their authority is necessary. The tendency in human nature is strongly selfish, or there would be no division among professing Christians. When the spirit of contention arose in the church at Corinth, Paul called it carnal and condemned it. We read that Paul went through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches; that he had the care of all

the churches, proving that he regulated churches in different localities evidently by one rule.

We read in Acts xv that while Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch, the Pharisees which believed were perplexed about accepting Gentiles into the church without circumcision, like as some people are perplexed about the mode of baptism, or whether infants should be baptized, or whether we ought to have for a day of rest the Old Testament Sabbath, or the First Day of the week on which our Saviour arose, now called Sunday, and to what degree we should abstain from our usual engagements on Sunday.

The question of difference at Antioch was by agreement of the disputants referred to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem, who, after some discussion, united upon a plan which they communicated to the perplexed church, and their decision settled the unrest. They were under an influence that preserved unity, and the proof is one united church regulation, respected by the congregations in different localities. We hold from the doctrine of oneness, voiced by the Saviour and the Apostles, that the same agreement in the church of Christ now exists and that all division is due to the cause foretold by Paul, Acts xx "of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." and that those who sanction divisions resist the truth.

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