

UNITY of the SPIRIT

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SEVERAL WEEKS AGO I spotted a hitchhiker along the road. As the car in front of me passed him by he made an obscene gesture. Then, substituting thumb for finger, he turned, expecting me to pick him up. Although I had considered giving him a ride, when I saw his reaction to the first motorist, I not only passed him by but momentarily considered running over him.

Shooting birds at passing cars never gets anyone a ride. And shooting holes in the Good Ship Zion, regardless of how slow it is sailing or how badly off course it seems to be, never leads anyone into the light.

Before I received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, I looked upon people who spoke in tongues and saw visions as fanatics (a fanatic being one who had lost his way and redoubled his efforts). After my experience with the Holy Spirit, I began to look upon all others who had not shared in my experiences as dead.

Now I painfully realize that I had become that which I abhorred in others: self-righteous, pious, and holier-than-thou.

Last summer I visited Allen and Irene Harrell in Wilson, North Carolina. Judge Harrell took me in and introduced me to the local Methodist minister. Everything went fine until the minister asked me about my ministry. Then I saddled my favorite horse and rode roughshod over him and the institution he represented, vociferously condemning all the "dead churches." He listened patiently to my tirade and finally said in love, "Could it be, brother, that we are not dead, only ignorant; waiting for someone to show us the light?"

What a gentle rebuke. Yet it stung like a lash as I saw myself as a candlesnuffer rather than a lamplighter.

I have a letter in my files from Ruth (Mrs. Billy) Graham. She had read the first draft of one of my books which has a chapter exposing the fallacies of certain Pentecostal organizations. She wrote:

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"There are enough worldlings shooting holes in the church without us joining the firing squad. Remember David's disagreement with Saul; yet he said, 'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice' (II Sam. 1:20)."

A while back, Peter Lord, one of my favorite Southern Baptist pastors, put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Don't be so rough on the brethren, Jamie. Just love us."

Love.

A mature pastor who had been voted out of his church because he preached the power of the Holy Spirit read one of my attacks against the very institution that kicked him out. "Remember," he wrote, "the fruit of the Spirit is love. And accompanying it is a whole tree full of graciousness, including gentleness, kindness, and long-suffering."

That night, after having received his letter, I could not sleep. I crawled out of bed and sat alone in the dark living room, weeping, repenting of my sin in thinking I had all the answers. And at that moment the Holy Spirit spoke, telling me to lay off the satire in my writing and never again play the role of the iconoclast. All that does, He reminded me, is cause division in the Kingdom and cause others to react and so blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

There is no place in the Body of Christ for a backbiter. (A backbiter is a backstabber who's misplaced his knife.) The Body is made up of ALL who call Jesus Lord. This includes those who believe in miracles and those who say God no longer performs miracles, those who speak in tongues and those who call tongues heresy.

The Body is made up of folks like

fundamentalist John R. Rice and Pope Paul. It is Assembly of God evangelist C.M. Ward who believes tongues is the evidence of the Spirit Baptism and Southern Baptist Convention president Carl Bates who says tongues is heresy. The Body is Billy Graham and Bob Jones, Jr. It is Norman Vincent Peale and Morris Cerullo. It is Carl McIntyre and Oral Roberts. It is Derek Prince and Merlin Carothers. It is Jerome Hines and the Cameron Family Singers.

These and millions of other disagreeing saints make up the Body. As members of this "family," we are commanded by our Father not to backbite, criticize, accuse, or condemn. If we have a difference with a brother (doctrinal or personal) we are to go directly to him — or keep our mouth shut. There is no excuse for public condemnation of another in the Body.

Recently I disagreed with a brother in another state concerning a move he was making. I wrote him and told him I thought he was copping out. He wrote back and said I didn't know his heart, or what the Lord had told him, and therefore I didn't know what I was talking about. After examining the facts (and my original poor attitude), I determined he was right — and I was wrong. But only the two of us were involved in the disagreement.

Week after week we are joining hands in our believers' meetings and praying for the unity of the Body of Christ. We're not talking about ecumenical unity, but spiritual unity. Along with this prayer is one I breathe silently that I will not make my words hypocritical by backbiting against those who disagree with me (even those who say I am heretical.)

If those who claim to be filled with the Spirit do not love ALL the brethren, then the spirit we are filled with is not the HOLY Spirit, but from some other source.

More and more I can see the wisdom of Edwin Markham's poem:

He drew a circle that shut me out—
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in! ♦♦