

Index of Articles:	Page
Prologue to John's Gospel, pt 1	1
Jacob Alone with God	3
Shepherd and the Sheep, pt 4	5
Unity	7

Prologue to John's Gospel

The first eighteen verses of John's gospel are identified as a prologue to the material that follows in this lovely gospel. This portion was inspired by the Holy Spirit even as the remainder, and it bears the marks of the lofty truths that He alone can express. There are themes that one finds here that are developed in the gospel, so it is an introduction to the truth that he gives us. F. F. Bruce says, "The prologue to the Fourth Gospel sets forth the theme of the whole work. The narrative as a whole spells out the message of the prologue: that in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth the glory of God was uniquely and perfectly disclosed." ("The Gospel of John").

All agree that the gospel of John has a different character than the synoptic gospels, all of which were written at an earlier time with each giving a different portrayal of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit of God has given four views of Christ, so that we might appreciate and understand in more detail the intricate and complete expression of who He was as eternal God, the Son, yet a perfect Man. MacLaren has written, "The other Gospels begin with Bethlehem; John begins with 'the bosom of the Father.' Luke dates his narrative by Roman emperors and Jewish high-priests; John dates his 'in the beginning.' To attempt adequate exposition of these verses in our narrow limits is absurd; we can only note the salient points of this, the profoundest page in the New Testament." ("Expositions of Holy Scripture").

Most students would place Mark's gospel first, believing that he wrote it about 65 AD. Possibly Luke's gospel was written circa 60–70 AD, though some place it later in time. Matthew's gospel was somewhat later, though some writers indicate that it was written early as well, either

85-90 AD, or about the same time as Luke. Though the time of writing is not the most important, we do know that John wrote this gospel last, near the end of the first century.

In addition, John's gospel was not written from the area in which the events took place. It is very likely that he was in Ephesus, in Asia Minor, when he took up his pen to write this beautiful gospel, and he was likely writing to a generation of those, both Jews and Gentiles, who, being separated by time and distance from Jerusalem, were unfamiliar with terms and events that had taken place. Quoting F. F. Bruce, "For the people of this new world, Jerusalem and Palestine were geographically remote, but more than that: the way of life which had been followed there sixty years earlier, and which formed the setting of the gospel narrative, belonged to a world which, they felt, had passed away for ever. The climate of opinion in which they lived was not greatly concerned about historical fact and geographical location. . . Eternal truth belonged to the spiritual realm, the realm that really mattered. . . John himself attached the utmost importance to eternal truth, which he identified with the divine self-expression, the Word that existed in the beginning with God."

Writing this paper from that standpoint, we know that different forms of Gnostic heresies had developed by his time. There were those among them who denied the real, corpo-

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ral humanity of the Lord Jesus, declaring that He was only a phantasm, and that He only appeared to have a human body. Taking a different view, there were some who denied the true deity of Christ, who thought (for various reasons), that He was a created being who emanated from God, but not God manifest in flesh. Both of these were attacks against the truth that God's Word declares about the Lord Jesus, and John was fully aware of those thought-lines. It seems that he wrote this gospel to give clear evidence that Jesus was truly God, none less than God from eternity, but now manifest in human flesh. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31). As a result, we find that he gives us seven self-expressions of the eternal God ("I Am"), and records seven miraculous events that give proof of His genuine deity. It isn't hard to see that the first epistle of John was written to give proof of "Jesus Christ, come in flesh," (1 John 4:2 JND), or to prove the reality of His humanity. He begins the epistle by providing evidence of that reality, since he saw, touched, and handled Him who is the Word of Life (1 John 1:1).

Since John is writing the gospel to give evidence of the deity of Christ, we are not surprised that he begins in eternity, speaking of the One who is "in" the bosom of the Father," (1:18) instead of writing of the One who was born of Mary, cradled in a manger outside the city of Bethlehem, growing up in Nazareth. He begins in eternity, and he gives proof that He of whom he writes is truly God.

"In the Beginning was"

John's gospel begins with a series of short statements that are designed to assert that the Word, who is Jesus Christ, is God. This first phrase affirms His ETERNITY, the One without beginning, Who existed without a beginning and was already existing when God created in Genesis 1:1. "The threefold utterance in John 1:1 carries us into the depths of eternity, before time or creatures were. Genesis and John both start from 'the beginning,' but, while Gen-

esis works downwards from that point and tells what followed, John works upwards and tells what preceded--if we may use that term in speaking of what lies beyond time. Time and creatures came into being, and, when they began, the Word 'was.' Surely no form of speech could more emphatically declare absolute, uncreated being, outside the limits of time." (MacLaren). "It is not by accident that the Gospel begins with the same phrase as the book of Genesis. In Gen. 1:1 'In the beginning' introduces the story of the old creation; here it introduces the story of the new creation. In both works of creation the agent is the Word of God." (F. F. Bruce). This expression makes it clear that when the material creation came into existence, the Word already was existing.

The verb "was" is a form of "to be" and it is in the imperfect tense, which conveys a simple continuous existence. It is helpful to notice in this prologue the tense of this word as it is used, sometimes in the imperfect and other times in the perfect, as in 1:3, "was made." When John speaks of the eternal Word, he uses the imperfect as in 1:1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 15. So that the Word is eternal.

Many discussions have surrounded the use of this expression, "Word", with some trying to show its derivation from Greek philosophical thought that was prevalent in John's day, and perhaps there is some truth in their argument. In their thinking, logos "denoted the principle of reason or order immanent in the universe, the principle which imposes form on the material world and constitutes the rational soul in man." (F. F. Bruce). However, the original word (logos) is a word often used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and this is more likely the basis of John's use of the word. In that setting, it signified "God in action, especially in creation, revelation and deliverance." (Bruce) (Genesis 1, 2; Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 38:4, 55:11, etc.). It signifies the outward expression of the inward thought, and even the inward thought itself. It was God's Word that expressed His power in creation, displayed His sovereign will in action and in speaking to mankind, and expressed His infinite wisdom through prophetic utterances. So this is an appropriate opening to the gospel that will present to the reader the perfect

expression of all that God is, thinks and acts, in the Person of His eternal Son. John the Baptist, in v. 23, could tell the Jews that he was the "voice", which is the audible expression of the word, but the Word exists in the mind before it is expressed in the voice. Our thoughts are usually in the form of words, and when we express those thoughts with our voice, we are using words. So it is with this expression; the Word existed in the mind of God eternally and was expressed in the coming and message of the Word made flesh, (v. 14). "Logos" is used other times in the New Testament, and it emphasizes the message conveyed rather than the voice used such as in 1 Corinthians 1:18.

"The Word was with God"

This phrase would emphasize the Word's CO-EQUALITY and continuous, active COMMUNION with God. The verb "with" indicates one who is in the presence of, but also in active relation with the object. He always existed in close, harmonious communion with God in the perfect sense of the word. It is a marvelous truth that there never was, nor could there ever be, anything that could interfere with the positive enjoyment of that eternal relationship. He was "in the bosom of the Father" (v. 18), and therefore He could manifest Him fully.

"The Word was God"

This statement declares His DEITY, for the Word was no less than one of the Godhead. Some cults have translated this to say, "the Word was a god" which is intended to teach that our blessed Lord was someone less than God himself. They base their argument for this translation (New World Translation) on the absence of the definite article before 'God' in the Greek text. However, John has a definite reason to omit the definite article, and it is not to say that the Word was less than God in any way! Quoting F. F. Bruce, "Since logos has the article preceding it, it is marked out as the subject. The fact that theos (God) is the first word after the conjunction ("and") shows that the main emphasis of the clause lies on it. Had 'theos' (God) as well as 'logos' been preceded by the article the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also

'with God'. What is meant is that the Word shared the nature and being of God." If John had used the definite article before "God", he would have been saying that the Word was all that God was, and thus erase the distinction between the persons of the Godhead. The absence of the article in Greek does not allow the insertion of an indefinite article, such as 'a' or 'an'. It indicates the character and nature of something being spoken of. So that the Word partook of the essential nature and every attribute of all that God was in His person.

I close this section with a quotation found in Hengstenberg's commentary on John's Gospel where he says, "Such words must be used of the true Saviour, of whom nothing higher can be said; otherwise there cannot be an entire and undivided consecration of the heart to Him. . . In reference to this eternal, unspeakable, and inconceivable mystery, we must believe more than we reason, adore more than we define, think more than we investigate, love more than we know, humble ourselves more than we speak."

(continued)

The most destructive criticism has not been able to dethrone Christ as the incarnation of perfect holiness. The waves of a tossing and restless sea of unbelief break at His feet, and He stands the supreme model, the inspiration of great souls, the rest of the weary, the fragrance of all Christendom, the one divine flower in the garden of God.

Jacob alone with God

Thus far, many blemishes have marred the history of Jacob. His desire at the outset for the birthright and the blessing of God, which accompanied it, was right: the way he schemed to obtain it altogether wrong. God had been but little in his thoughts, and when, fleeing from Esau's vengeance, in a night vision he discovered the house of God, he felt it to be a dreadful place. One of our hymn writers describing his soul's journey, began with, "All of self and none of Thee." If it was not exactly thus with Jacob, it had certainly been, "Nearly all of self and very little of Thee."

Now however the time had come when God would deal more directly with him, and the first move was that he should encounter an angelic band. Jacob was migrating with wives, children, servants and many animals, thus forming a large band. He now became conscious that there was a second band, standing on his behalf. Even this did not free him from the fear of Esau, and his approach to him, as given in verses Genesis 32:3-5, though very diplomatic, bears traces of the working of a bad conscience.

Genesis 32:7 again bears witness to this. The tidings that Esau, at the head of four hundred men, was coming to meet him, awoke his keenest fears. In spite of having seen the angelic band, he assumed at once, as the fruit of the working of his conscience, that Esau was on his way to take vengeance and, true to his nature, he at once worked out an elaborate scheme to placate his brother and secure himself. All his possessions, starting with flocks and servants and working down to wives and children, were to meet the brother he feared before he himself had to face him.

But this did not altogether exclude God from his thoughts. In verses Genesis 32:9-12, we have his prayer recorded. God had intervened with him previously and Jacob had registered a vow, but this is the first actual prayer of his that is put on record. It does not breathe the spirit of communion and intercession, such as marked Abraham in Genesis 18:1-33, it was simply a plea for preservation, while acknowledging God's mercies to him in the past. Yet we notice how rightly he took a low place, though not as low as Abraham, who said, "I... am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Jacob says, "I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies," which was indeed true, though it did not go the whole length. It is a fact in all dispensations that one's sense of unworthiness and nothingness deepens as nearness to God increases. As an illustration of this see Psalm 73:17, 22.

Jacob's plan was to appease Esau with a present, as verse Genesis 32:20 records. All — even wives and sons — were sent over the brook at the ford Jabbok, and he was left alone, well to the rear. Not a very dignified or courageous proceeding! Yet God was in all this, for

being left alone, the moment had come for him to be brought face to face with God Himself, that he might have an experience, the effect of which he would never lose. Up to this point his life had been mainly one of scheming against and wrestling with men. Now God by His Messenger was going to wrestle with him.

"There wrestled a man with him;" such is the record, and doubtless at the start of this incident the unknown Stranger was to Jacob but a mere man. Who was Jacob to give way to another man? Hence it put him on his mettle to resist. The Stranger strove to break him down and until breaking of the day he resisted. Then the supernatural nature of the Stranger was manifested by the powerful touch which crippled him at his strongest point.

Then at once Jacob's attitude changed. Instead of wrestling, which now had become impossible to him he took to clinging to his Conqueror. He ceased his striving and took to trusting, realizing that the One who had overcome him had done so for his blessing, and that he was in the presence of God. The Name of the Stranger was not revealed, but the blessing that Jacob had desired from his youth was bestowed upon him then and there.

"He blessed him there," in the place of solitude with God, and when his natural power was crippled and laid low. The vital blessing of God did not descend upon his head when he struck that crafty bargain with Esau, nor even when his blind father, deceived by his impersonation of Esau, pronounced the patriarchal blessing on his head. No, it was when God dealt with him personally in solitude, and broke his stubborn will. In all this we may see a picture of how God deals with our souls today, though the grace into which we are called is so much richer than anything that Jacob knew.

By naming the place Peniel — "The face of God" — Jacob disclosed his deep sense of having been brought face to face with God and that the outcome was preservation and not destruction. Here was good reason for him to revise his earlier thought that the house of God and the gate of heaven was a "dreadful" place.

In this incident we see foreshadowed several striking things. First, that in order to deal fully and finally with man, God Himself would stoop into manhood, since it was as "a

man" that Jacob saw God "face to face." Second, that God's thought towards us, even the most wayward of us, is blessing. Third, that human struggling and wrestling achieves nothing, and that surrender or submission, and honesty in confession, is the way of blessing. Fourth, that it was when clinging to the One who had vanquished him, and confessing to his name of Jacob - meaning Supplanter — that his name was changed to Israel — meaning Prince of God — and he was told that he had power not only with men but with God, and he had prevailed. By changing his name God claimed Jacob as belonging now to Him.

Thus a great moment in his history had been reached, and as he realized that he had seen God face to face, with salvation as the result, the sun rose upon him. An experience of this kind in the history of any soul does indeed mark the dawning of a new day. In Jacob's case the experience was memorialized for his children by a simple prohibition in their eating, as the last verse of the chapter records.

(FBH)

Shepherd and the Sheep, pt. 4

God's people recognize the need for spiritual shepherds among them. We have looked at the pattern of God's shepherding of His people in the Old Testament, and remind our hearts that His shepherd care of His people never ended with past dealings. He is still the Great Shepherd of the sheep and functions in the same manner today.

Example of Christ

In the New Testament, we find descriptions of our Lord Jesus in His brief earthly ministry, and learn that He was still the same Jehovah who longed for the care and blessing of His own. In Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35, we view this scene of our blessed Lord's life: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye

shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The scene is most touching, when we recognize that this was the city to which He had come and where He had displayed His power and the credentials of His Messiahship, but that it was also the city that was soon to join in the chorus to reject Him. In these words, He expressed the constant longing of His heart, to gather them and to shelter them.

We learn that His shepherd care is His constant desire, that He knows the needs of His people better than they do and He could recognize their danger. Yet they could not enjoy that care unless they responded to Him, and for that to take place, it was essential that they recognize who He was. If that caring compassion was displayed during the years of His humanity toward those who deliberately rejected Him, we can be assured that it is still His desire toward us in our lives.

Again, in Luke 19:41-44, we see Him weeping (one of the three recorded times that He wept), over the city, "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

In Matthew 9:36, He looked on the multitude with compassion, because He saw them as "sheep having no shepherd." Immediately following that expression, He reminded His disciples of the greatness of the harvest and the fewness of the laborers, after which He sent them forth to minister in His Name to the people. The character of their ministry shows that He saw their physical and spiritual needs and desired to meet both aspects of man's nature. Matthew 14:14, 15:32, Mark 6:34 show us that His desires were directed toward both their physical needs (sicknesses, hunger) and spiritual needs ("he began to teach them many things.")

Shepherd Characteristics of Christ

There are other examples of His demonstrated care as a Shepherd, but we look at John 10 to see how He described His Shepherding of His people. He displayed the characteristics of a true shepherd of the sheep that should be emulated by all who seek to carry out the same responsibility. This descriptive chapter follows the revelation of the hypocrisy of those false leaders of Israel, who claimed to be shepherds, but who had failed miserably. They were men who were grasping to retain an office and privilege, but who had no heart or ability to carry out the responsibilities that it included.

1. He entered Scripturally (v.1-2). The Jewish system was a fold, constituted by the enclosure of God's people under the Mosaic law as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. Others had sought to enter in their pretension to be qualified as shepherds, but they were rejected and thus sought to enter some other way, as had the scribes, Pharisees, and other religious leaders. He entered through the door, (John 10:1-2), which teaches us that when He came, He fulfilled the prophetic scriptures and entered properly, as the One of whom the Scripture had been speaking. His entrance was scriptural. He presented all the credentials to them that proved that He was the Shepherd of Israel personified. He didn't force himself in and exalt Himself over Israel, in contrast to the religious leaders dealt with in chapter 9. A true shepherd of God's people will act under the authority of God's Word, and will know that undertaking that responsibility is according to God's will.

2. The porter recognized and opened the door to Him. (v. 3). The porter, who is likely the Holy Spirit, opened the door by announcing His coming so that He didn't enter by subtlety or maneuverings to influence men to support Him. The Spirit of God used the ministry of John to announce His coming and to prepare the people for that moment. He distinctly pointed them to Him as he identified Christ coming to His people in manifestation. A true shepherd doesn't need to use man's normal means to exalt himself, but he recognizes God's call to fulfill that work and to serve under

Christ for the welfare of God's people.

3. He knew the sheep individually (v. 3). The sheep in that sheepfold of Judaism responded to His voice, since the sheep always recognize their true shepherd (v. 3), and since He knew their name they responded to His voice. There were many sheep in that fold who didn't respond to His voice since they weren't His sheep. As a result, they joined to reject Him and ultimately to condemn Him to the cross. All of His sheep are known personally, with all their problems and needs directly the subject of His care, and this is always a characteristic of a true shepherd.

4. He led the sheep by His example and teaching (v. 3-4). He didn't drive them, but displayed the reality of His own personal character and genuine godliness so that they willingly followed and learned from Him. Shepherds do not drive sheep in that land but they go before them and lead. Sheep willingly follow one who cares for them. He didn't come to improve the fold, but to call His own out of that fold to something entirely new, not based on the ground of law and works, but on grace and spiritual power. It is the godly example and the teaching ability of a man that proves that he is a true shepherd of God's people, and they will readily follow him.

5. He went before them as a Guide (v.4). It was His example and pattern of unswerving fidelity to God and manifested love for God's people that led them and gave the people hope of receiving spiritual food and direction for their lives. We see the people flocking to hear Him, even in the wilderness, and He satisfied them physically and spiritually by His faithful and kind ministry. There was not another like Him! Since they recognized the voice of the true shepherd, they rejected all others as false. The reality of divine life in a "sheep" is that they have the ability to detect what is of God and what isn't, (1 John 2:26-28), and they will respond positively.

In Christ, there was salvation first (10:9), a blessed reality that gave security in a way that was never experienced by any under the law. In addition, it gave liberty ("go in and

out”), the freedom of access to God by a “new and living way” (Hebrews 10:19-20) and the liberty of propagating a public testimony that represents Him to others. These were blessings for which the heart of His people craved, but in which they had not participated under the legalism of the law.

6. He protected the sheep (v. 8-10). There were many thieves then, as there are now, who are determined to “steal, and to kill, and to destroy”. There are some in this chapter who the sheep should not follow. They are the thief (v. 1, 8, 10), who steals secretly, the robber (v. 1), who openly plunders with violence, the stranger (v. 5), who is one who is not known to the sheep, the hireling shepherd, (v. 12), who only cares for them for what he gets in wages, and the wolf (v. 12), who always seeks to destroy and devour. Christ, the good shepherd, was a contrast with them all! He gives life instead of death, blessing in place of suffering and loss, joy instead of sorrow. He is the source of all blessing, and His care is constant and faithful.

7. He gave His life for the sheep (v.11, 15, 17). He was the “good” Shepherd. We learn that “good” carries the thought of “beautiful”, which makes us think of His beauty, not only of body, but of character. He was truly the “beautiful” Shepherd in all that He was and all that He came to accomplish. He showed His inward perfection to care for His sheep to the extent of laying down His life for them. Initially, that could apply to His coming into the world in lowliness to serve and to do the Father's will, for He laid down His life with respect to all that He expressed eternally, though yet being all that He was essentially. The extent of His laying down His life was to the cross-death, since v. 17 speaks of His taking it up again in resurrection. No one ever proved His love for the sheep like this One, so that no price was too great for Him to pay. In v. 11, His laying down His life was an example to the sheep and the under-shepherds, in contrast to the false, but in v. 15, it is to deliver them from the vicious attacks of their enemies. This He did, not out of obligation, but rather from His own free will, from love for His Father, and love for the sheep.

His ultimate statement in v. 27-30 sums up the great truths that He had been expressing. His sheep hear His voice, He knows them, they follow Him. It is from Him that they derive every blessing, especially eternal life through His death and resurrection. Eternal security is clearly taught in these verses, and the impossibility of anyone ever causing one of His sheep to perish is totally rejected. It is the Father's will that through His work, all who are His will be saved, secured, and satisfied, and He has all power and authority to accomplish this.

He is the great example of shepherd care that our God delights to see in all those who take this responsibility, to care for believers where He has placed them. None of us can ever attain to the perfection of His pattern that He has displayed for us, but it is an encouragement and a stimulus, that we might manifest the same character of service.

(continued)

**A Christian life is not an imitation,
but a reproduction of the life
of Christ.**

Unity

“Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Psalm 133:1

There is no difficulty in obtaining the Christian's assent to this observation of the Psalmist. Indeed we never knew a Christian but what advocated unity. He would be a strange specimen who would advocate division. And yet in spite of this, division abounds on every hand. Why is it?

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” Galatians 6:7. If we sow a certain kind of seed we shall reap unity: if another kind we shall reap division. This is God's inexorable law. Carnal Christians sow the seed that produces division. “For ye are carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, strife,

and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?" 1 Corinthians 3:3. Here is seed that is native to every human heart, and we will sow it unless we are on our watch tower. Envy is displeasure felt at the excellence of another. This is what ailed the disciples when they "disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest" Mark 9:24. The disciples were ashamed to tell the Lord what they were disputing about "by the way," that made them so hot at one another. Think of it, they fighting for who should be the greatest—when the Son of man was on the way to the cross! They might well have been ashamed of themselves.

What assembly is not tormented by some proud, selfish, carnal men who are always fighting for the supremacy? "Envy is the rottenness of the bones," Proverbs 14:30. Two men get envious at one another, and a fight begins. One says, "I am of Paul: and another, I am of Apollos," and the bones of the assembly rot. "Who is able to stand before envy?" Proverbs 27:4. A man's godliness will not save him from the envy of the man who wants to exploit himself. "They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord," Psalm 106:16. Moses' God-given leadership did not save him from the attack of the envious, nor did Aaron's saintliness. The very bones of the congregation were beginning to rot. But God manifested who were His, and burned up the transgressors.

"Strife." Where envy is at work, strife will not long be lacking. "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends," Proverbs 16:28. What avails it if men talk unity and sow strife? Whispering around about this one and that one in order to uplift himself at the expense of others. Whispering around for my man, or my party—just a whisper—yes, but remember, "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with," Proverbs 17:14. Then the talebearer follows on the heels of the whisperer. "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out; so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth," Proverbs 26:20. Proud heart then comes along, and, "He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife," Proverbs 28:25. With such seed sown in an assembly, how can it escape division?

"Division." Every little while we hear of division in an assembly. Each faction sends out its letters asking for the fellowship of neighboring assemblies. Some think the one side is right; some the other, and so the trouble spreads like a canker. Both sides have been sowing the same baneful seed for weeks, months, or even years, and God is not mocked, they are both reaping a bitter harvest: and God's testimony is dishonored; saints are defiled; and sinners are stumbled. Brethren, who of us have not scattered this hateful seed? Who of us have not reaped?

When a new assembly is being formed there is first a seeking of the fellowship of the Lord's servants; and of the elder brethren in the neighboring assemblies, so far as possible, thus endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit between assemblies, as well as between individuals in assemblies. This is as it should be. When evil seed has been sown, and division is brewing in an assembly, why should that assembly not seek counsel from the Lord's servants in whom it has confidence, and from godly brethren in neighboring assemblies to see if division cannot be averted: and if not, then others would know with which party the blame of the division lay. (See Acts 15.) We feel that if this were done, there would be but few divisions, save such as are caused by men arising, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after themselves, (Acts 20:30). If no separations took place save such as have the fellowship of the godly in surrounding assemblies there would be but few divisions, and little or no difficulty in knowing which company should be recognized. To divide and then for each faction to ask for recognition spreads trouble broadcast. Let us not forget that division is the harvest from carnality, sown in envy, strife, and such like evil seed. The most Scriptural unity doctrine in the world will not prevent this harvest, where this seed is sown.

If we want unity we must sow seed that will yield unity as its harvest. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins," Proverbs 10:12. A man might be an Apollos for oratory, a Paul in understanding all mysteries,

a Cephas in zeal; but without love, in God's reckoning, he is but sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal, (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). Paul may plant, Apollos water; but God must give the increase; "so then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one . . . for we are laborers together with God." 1 Corinthians 3:7-9. To be a fellow worker with God, and be rewarded for our work, requires that we sink self into nothingness: and this can only be done by love,, "love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," 1 Cor. 13:4-7.

How long could "envy, strife, and division," exist if each person in an assembly were diligently sowing this uniting seed? Paul, Apollos, Cephas; what famous men to put at the head of factions! And what faction has not some famous man at its head? The factions of the most insignificant division cluster around some man who has a little preeminence of some kind. He becomes the standard bearer, and is flattered to see his faction growing. Not so with the apostle: He takes the place of a nothing, and shews the foolishness and sin of men fighting for him.

Love is a very practical thing, "love is the fulfilling of the law," it was all that the law asked—perfect love to God, and perfect love to man. So obedience to the word of God becomes the test of love. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments," 1 John 5:2. All His commandments make for unity. "I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment," 1 Corinthians 1:10. In discarding our own thoughts, and speaking God's thoughts we are sowing seeds of unity. Speaking perverse (twisted) things sows seeds of discord. (Acts 20:30). Twisted things draw disciples to some men: speaking the truth in love disciples "grow

up into Him in all things which is the Head, even Christ," Ephesians 4:15. It matters not what the twisted things are, it may even be a unity fad that sows seeds of discord, and divides God's people: or faith healing, or unleavened bread, or 'household baptism,' or any other hobby that will not stand the test of the word of God.

Difference of judgment is taken all too lightly nowadays. Likemindedness is enjoined upon us. "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man on the things of others," Philipians 2:2-4. In conforming to these things we are sowing seeds of unity.

Offences will come, troubles will arise: provision has been made for such, "Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering: forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfectness," 3:12-14. If each child of God were constantly putting on these things how easily quarrels could be settled. Only as such seed is being constantly sown can we expect to harvest unity. Let us learn that unity is not to be attained by subscribing to some unity theory, but by constant self-judgment and ceasing from doing things that tend to "envy, strife and division," and by cultivating that Christlikeness that springs from godly conformity to the word of God. Where this is, the unity of our psalm will be realized.

(EAM)

*To Dwell above, with saints we love,
That surely will be glory;
To dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.*