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Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit.

UNITY OF SPIRIT.

A SERMON

PREACHED ON SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 19TH. 1862,

By MR. JAMES WELLS,

AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET.

“Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”—ROMANS XV. 7.

OUR eternal salvation originated in the free, eternal, and immutable love of God; it was, therefore, a matter entirely of loving kindness sending a Saviour into the world. Thus it always was and will be true as long as the people of God have any troubles, that “as a father pitieth his children, so doth the Lord pity them that fear him.” No one understands so well as he does their weaknesses, their burdens, and the causes of their infirmities. He rests in that same immutable love; and the Lord Jesus Christ came because he loved us. It was his love that brought him into the world, that kept him in that obedience which he rendered; it was his love to us and to God that kept him firm through all he endured, where many waters could not quench love, neither could the floods drown it. So of the Holy Spirit; he is represented as the dove, to denote that the whole of his work is of a peaceful, loving, and sympathetic kind. Thus the Lord brings us to himself, into his own love wherewith he hath loved us, and hath so ordered matters that all the objects of his love shall come into the unity of the faith, and shall dwell together for ever. And in order that they may be happy together, and show, not only here below, but in eternity, that love one to the other is essential to that happiness, they were originally, in the fulness of this love, blessed with all spiritual blessings, to the end that they should be holy, being washed from their sins by the blood of Christ, and, without blame, being justified by his righteousness, and kept firm in the truth to the end, and so be found blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus, that they may thus be perfect before him in love. Hence true Christian, brotherly love has been of great price in the eyes of the Lord in all ages, and will never lose its value either in this world or the world to come.

Our text divides itself into three parts. First, *brotherly love*—“receive ye one another.” Secondly, *the pattern of that reception*—“as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” Thirdly, *the beautiful end to be answered*—the glory of God. There is nothing the Christian more delights in than to glorify the God of infinite mercies, infinite both in number and magnitude. We cannot too much exalt this Redeemer, or speak too highly of our God.

First, *brotherly love*, in receiving one another—“receive ye one another.” Now we are to receive each other in truth and in love. High as love

may stand, truth stands higher, if possible; that is, truth must come first. We can only receive each other in truth and in love; that is to say, men must be so convinced of their state as sinners as to be made to feel they can be saved only by the grace of God; and in the Lord's own time they will be led to trace out how and in what way that grace bath saved them; they will see it was grace that saved them originally; hence election is said to be an election of grace. They will see it was grace that saved them mediatorially. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich." And they will find out that it is by grace they are called. "He called me," saith one, "by his grace." And as they go on from stage to stage, their experience will convince them of the truth of the position of the apostle when he saith, "By the grace of God I am what I am." And by and by they will also see that the top-stone is to be brought home with shoutings of "Grace and grace unto it;" that is, not only that the last saved sinner shall be saved by grace as well as the first, and all intermediate ones, but it means this also—that he who began the good work in your heart by the riches of his grace must finish it; for if grace does not in your personal experience and destiny bring home the top-stone, that is, complete your eternal glory; nothing else can. Hence David saith, "I know that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." Now, when our fellow-creatures thus manifest their knowledge of grace, their knowledge of the truth, manifest the love of the truth, and can give us some testimony of this, then we can receive them in the Spirit, receive them really and truly. I will, just for the sake of sending the information abroad, describe here what our order is in receiving Christian people into this church. I think a word or two upon that may perhaps do no harm; it may give a little information and correct some few mistakes. We are, of course, no rule for another church, but we think our rule is scriptural, and that we are right; we have never yet been convinced that we are wrong. Our order stands thus; when any friends wish to unite with the church, they are requested to leave their names in the vestry, and the deacons take their names and addresses. Then an evening is appointed on which I and the deacons see these friends, one by one, and get a sample of their experience. They very quietly, some of them, tell us some sweet and beautiful things in relation to their experience. When we have heard what they have to say, encouraging them to tell us how they were convinced of their state, and came to have a hope in God's mercy, we then take references as to their moral character; and our deacons go and carefully inquire as to their moral character; and if we find that all right, an evening is appointed for a church meeting, and these same friends are written to to come to this church meeting, and there they state what they have stated to myself and the deacons in the vestry; taking care in the vestry, as well as before the church, amongst other things to see that they are strict Baptists. We question them upon that, and if we see they are convinced that baptism is right, and that as Jesus Christ himself in his mediatorial work is the only way to the table above, so the ordinance of baptism that he has instituted is the only scriptural way to the table below—if we see them thus convinced not only of baptism, but also of scriptural order, then if their experience be right, and moral character right, then we receive them. We don't say to them,—Will you pledge yourselves never to sit down with a church that is not a strict Baptist Church, seeing that in so doing you would deny your own principles, and sanction the disorderly conduct of our brethren the non-Baptists? For we do not unchristianize people for not being Baptists. We do not ask them if they will ever do this; we do not go so far as that—we ask them this,—What are you now? What are your feelings now? Could you, according to your present convictions, sanction any other

order? If they say, "Oh, yes," then we let them go; we do not receive them. But if they say, "No, I could not, according to my present feelings, sanction any other order," why, then we receive them. And if after that they should turn round and become open-Communion Baptists, then of course they themselves are responsible to God for their own doings;—we should not unchristianize them for that; we should regret and lament it, and should fear that they were never really and truly convinced of the Lord's order, or else they would *not have turned from it*, and of course in so doing they cease to be members with us. This is the way in which we receive people. And if the experience they give is not satisfactory, though their moral character be satisfactory,—if they do not yet know the truth, we cannot receive them in the truth, because they have not yet received the truth. You cannot receive a person in the truth that is not yet in the truth, and has not yet received the truth. We sometimes say, Well, we hope and trust the Lord has begun a work of grace in your heart;—we cannot receive you now in the truth, because you are not yet brought into the truth;—go on and seek the Lord; do not run away; wait and see. We let such stand over for a few weeks or a few months: and perhaps, as has actually happened in many cases, such will come forward afterwards, and bless the Lord for our faithfulness, honesty, and decision in causing them to stand back for a time; but they are now enlightened into the truth, and see that if they had been received before, they would have been received, as it were, in ignorance. It is a very solemn matter to receive persons into the church. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." It appears at Corinth there were persons received into that church from some motive or another; perhaps they were rich, or something or another; the same as persons are received into churches now in some places,—by the tyranny of certain parties in those churches, that are determined to have such and such people in. Now at Corinth they received some that had not a good experience of the truth; and the apostle saith, "Some"—that is, some you have received,—"have not the knowledge of God; I speak this to your shame." It is therefore a shame so to deceive a soul as to receive a man or woman into the church because they may be rich, and some great temporal advantage is expected thereby. To receive such, on such dishonest grounds, the Holy Spirit declares to be a shame. It is a shame for Christians in these solemn matters to act upon such carnal motives; it is a shame thus to deceive the souls of men. This, then, is the way in which we receive them. And then, when we inquire as to their moral character, if we are not satisfied, the matter drops; the persons are not written to, and there is an end of it. And as to baptism, why it is to me surprising that good people do not see it. As I observed last Monday evening, there were a great many ordinances in the Levitical dispensation, and we have the ordinance of the Lord's Supper in the New Testament dispensation; but at what other ordinance have you ever had such a revelation of the Eternal Three as you have at the ordinance of baptism? There was the presence of the Eternal Three when Christ was baptized. And of all the commands the Saviour gave, where did he ever give a command so emphatically, and to be carried out in the names of the Eternal Three, as that of baptism? "Baptising in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." I might make more remarks here, but I will not. I have nothing in my mind, God is my witness, but the best of feelings towards all—Baptists and non-Baptists; but at the same time, I must be decided for what I believe to be right; at the same time I desire to be so in the spirit of love. Therefore I receive my non-Baptist brethren in truth and in love in my spirit, and feel a union of soul to them, and love them, and bless God for what he has done for them; but I cannot receive them into church-fellowship, because their eyes are not yet opened to see that scriptural order which the Lord has established. For myself,

I saw baptism soon after the Lord called me by his grace and mercy; and I do not know what our non-Baptist friends think sometimes;—and some whom I love are here that are not Baptists; I am sure you will not be offended when I say that you must have this thought sometimes,—you must take it to bed with you, and get up with it, and walk about with it, and live with it, and die with it, and you must be glorified with it to all eternity. What thought? Well, whatever antipathy I have against baptism, or the Baptists, I must be saved by a Baptist at the last; for Jesus Christ certainly was a Baptist, I can't deny that;—so that I must be saved by a Baptist, and I must go to heaven by a Baptist, and I must owe an infinite debt of gratitude to a Baptist to all eternity. And the very first minister of the New Testament dispensation is called what no other is called—he is called John the Baptist, because he was the instrumental founder of the ordinance, for Christ commanded John to baptize, so that you must be saved by a Baptist at last,—bless the Lord for salvation at all;—and our non-Baptist friends do not object to that; you do not object to being saved by a Baptist, do you? I know you do not; I know you love the Saviour's name, and that he has often smiled upon you. And there is another point I may just name here:—I have seen the question asked sometimes in magazines,—If the Independents are wrong, how is it that some of them enjoy the presence of the Lord at the table of the Lord? Well, friends, for this reason,—that the Lord comes to all his people sovereignly, and though they have come to the table in a disorderly way, the Lord will not stop away on that account; for he does not come to us on the ground of our good doing, nor stay away from us on the ground of our omissions,—he comes in the riches of his grace. I am sure that his smiling upon them does not for a moment sanction their disorder, for that would be to hold the doctrine which I am sure no man that fears God will hold,—that he may sin that grace might abound; the Lord cometh unto us when he pleaseth. I would just say that though I am a Baptist myself, and it is very natural for me to speak well of my own, as it were, part of the church, yet if we enjoy the Lord's presence at the table, I am sure he does not come and say, You have been so good as to obey my command, therefore I will come and smile upon you. He doth smile upon us *in* it, but not *for* it. We must distinguish between what you may call human merit and the Lord's own ways. You will thus see I am as charitable as I possibly can be, because I have lived to learn that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

“Wherefore receive ye one another;” but it must be in truth and in love. You know what the Saviour saith; “Every one that has heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me.” Therefore if they are not brought into the truth, and the truth is not in them, you are justified in declining to receive them, but never in speaking unkindly to them. There are two or three in our midst now that are standing over, and I am glad to see you come from time to time; I hope I shall see you soon come forward; I hope that those points that were difficult to you then will be cleared up to you, and that you will see your way, and that we shall see our way to receive you. I must thus publicly assure you that we love you in the Lord, with the hope that a work of grace is begun. But when we decline receiving them, and they run away offended, go I do not know where, that is a very bad sign indeed. We are never harsh if we can possibly help it; indeed, I may say we never are. I think I can say that the deacons are always kind and courteous, and careful, at the same time; all that are received must be received in truth and in love, for there is nothing without truth, nothing will wear well that is not based upon truth. And when you have a good experience, though a painful one, of what you are as a sinner, you gladly receive God's blessed truth, and in receiving that truth, in the love of it you show, from time to time, to whom you belong.

Also, there are some churches which, I regret to see, have monthly church meetings. They must have a church meeting every month; and the quarrels, the disputations, the temporal affairs of one and another, the domestic affairs of one and the other, are brought before the church; and it gratifies a certain class, a few of whom no doubt are more or less in every church;—some cackling women, and there are some contentious men, that are never at peace only when they are at war; and they are three parts starved if they cannot make a dust in the church to feed upon. I do hope, therefore, not only during but after my time that this Christian church will never allow itself to be subjected to the contentions, accusations, and various idle tales of contentious men and cackling women. Now the object of a church meeting should be entirely a spiritual; and I look back over the last few years, with one or two little exceptions, at our church meetings,—how highly have we been favoured. Let there be a church meeting when the deacons think proper: and if you have not confidence in your deacons, dismiss them, and choose men you have confidence in; not choose men to act as deacons, and then set to and tyrannize over them, and call them to an account on no ground whatever; that is not the way to go on in peace and dwell in peace. We have been, then, highly favoured in this, and also we have been highly favoured as a church and people. Out of the twenty-six Christian friends that were baptized last Monday night, I think seventeen or eighteen of them were brought to know the Lord in this our own place. Indeed, we have friends scattered pretty well all over the world,—persons who have been brought to know the Lord in our own place. You must forgive my making these remarks about ourselves; for I do think the Lord hath done great things for us as a church and congregation. See the numbers sprinkled now over the different colonies of the world, and a great many in America, who were brought in this place, or at least in the old Surrey Tabernacle,—and we reckon it all the same in a sense,—to know the Lord; and there they are, some of them, preaching the gospel in foreign parts, having been removed there by providence. But is there one of them that forgets the Surrey Tabernacle? is there one of them that forgets his birth-place? is there one of them that forgets your humble servant? is there one of them whose eyes do not glisten with delight at the very sight of our little penny sermon? And they say,—Ah, James Wells is still alive; his friends are still his friends; the truth is still sounded out, the Lord of hosts is still with them, the God of Jacob is still their refuge. And thus, scattered in different parts of the world, they remember you; yea, are ready to say,—Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth rather than I should forget the Surrey Tabernacle. I will always remember it in my solemn prayer to the throne of grace, that the truth may continue to prosper, and that the people may still continue to walk in truth and love, and we must remember them at the same throne of grace. And I do not despair but that the gospel will yet look up in the colonies,—ah, even in Australia, the Lord is not at a loss for instrumentality; he will find means, and he will find out his people, carry on his work, his sheep shall hear his voice, and he will search them out where they have been scattered in the cloudy and in the dark day. Thus then we receive one another not temporarily,—we receive one another for ever. There is no distance, there is no circumstance, there is nothing can intervene that can really sever—it may sever communion between us for a time, but it cannot sever the unity of spirit that exists; that unity is for eternity. We receive our God, our God receiveth us, and we receive each other in truth and love; we have one interest, one Father, one Jesus Christ, one Lord, one faith, one ordinance of baptism, and by that ordinance I mean, and so do you, faithfully to abide. Let men say what they may, even our brethren, we must not in some respects know our brethren, or acknowledge our own children; we must keep God's covenant, we must set incense

before him, we must abide by the law of God's eternal truth, and he will be with us in so doing. It is a treasure of treasures to have this brother's spirit. I will drop the ordinances for a moment,—apart from all ordinances;—I am not going to turn round and unchristianize our dear brethren and sisters in the Lord that do not see baptism, are not convinced. Therefore when we meet with those that can give some account of their sinnership,—their experience of it,—how they have been driven to Christ, constrained to receive the yea and amen promise of the gospel, the truth as it is in Jesus, can we say in our hearts when we see such that we are glad? One came, and he saw the grace of God, and was glad. Can we say, when a little one comes forward, and we can see it is a little one, that we feel a unity of spirit to him; for “he that receiveth one of these little ones,” in truth and in love, “receiveth me,” saith the Saviour; “and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

Then the apostle saith not only that we are to receive each other, but “let brotherly love continue.” Brotherly love must continue by our standing firm in God's truth, only in the love of it, and by not expecting too much of each other. You must not expect too much of your minister; he is a man compassed with infirmity, like the rest, and knocked about one way and the other. It is all very well for people to say,—He ought not to have said so and so in the pulpit, and have omitted so and so; and a certain few, perhaps, will watch after all the infirmities the man manifests. I can tell you this,—that when you are dark in soul, fettered in spirit, contracted in heart, perplexed with circumstances, and as miserable as ever you can exist, to come into the pulpit then, and be as humble, as loving, as quiet, and as comfortable, and go on to state the truth without the least perturbation of manner,—it is no small task. It is all very easy for you to sit down there, but if you were up here, as the man said, you would feel very different, I can tell you. Therefore, if your minister does sometimes seem a little out, you must be charitable;—you must say, He is but a man. As Mr. Gladsby used to say,—“They try to find out some faults in me, and I cannot give them much credit for discovering a broken pane in a window that has not a whole pane in it, and for discovering a crack in an old wall that is all cracks; and after all, I do not think they see so many infirmities in me as I see in myself.” And the minister seeing this in himself is humbled. Perhaps you would hardly believe it—yes, you will too, because you know I would not stand in such a solemn position and say what the Lord would not say amen to; but I sometimes pity you with all my soul. I sometimes come in such a state of mind that I seem as though I had not a word to say; I seem more fit to be in a bedlam or workhouse, or dungeon, or somewhere or another, rather than in the pulpit. I think,—If the people but did know what a state I am in, they would every one get up and go out, for I have nothing for them. But then the thought will come,—Well, perhaps the less I have for them the more the Lord has for them. And there are many now scattered over England that were brought to know the Lord in this place, and sometimes those very sermons the Lord has wonderfully owned and honoured. I suppose this is what the apostle means when he speaks of being in season and out of season. Just so with hearing;—you shall sometimes hear a sermon, and be heartily glad when the minister leaves off; and say, I wonder where in the world our minister has got to this morning, I can't get on at all. There shall be something said in that sermon that the Lord will treasure up for you; by and by you come into some experience of difficulty, and you say, I thought nothing of that remark when the minister made it, but now it comes to me so nicely; what a comfort it is to me. So that the very remarks which are nothing to you when they are made, for aught you know may be a blessing to you at a future day. So “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. David

therefore emphatically saith, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

One more word upon receiving one another. We are not, as I said just now, to expect too much. And as to the devotedness of the people here to God, I am perfectly satisfied upon that; but we will have just one more word upon this brotherly love in the practice of it. "Put on, as the elect of God,"—harsh, unfeeling, iron, unbonding, dry sentiments? No;—that is the way the elect of God are represented by the world; but the apostle saith, "Put on, as the elect of God,"—why, the elect of God ought to be the humblest people in the world, even according to their own confession; for they confess it was of the Lord's mercies that they were ever taken at all; they confess it is of the Lord's mercies they are not consumed. If you had some merit or goodness of your own, you might pique yourself upon that; but we confess to being pensioners entirely upon the grace of our God, "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." As I hinted just now, at church meetings,—when there are private quarrels between two of the members or people, if it cannot be settled in private, I am sure it cannot in public. Cases of public discipline are another thing.—they must be dealt with publicly by the church. But when people want to bring their private quarrels before the church, that is a proof to me the devil is in that, and we must be blind if we do not see the cloven foot. Therefore take the Holy Scriptures for your guide;—"forgiving one another; if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Oh, if this were practised! go up and say, Brother, sister, I was very much offended about so and so, but I feel as though the Lord were delivering me over to the tormentors for my unforgiving spirit; I feel very miserable; let us explain the matter, or else without explanation let it drop, and let bygones be bygones. Hence saith the Saviour, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses. Here we have, then, the doctrine of mercy. The minister must not expect too much of the people, nor too much of the congregation. But if I should ever expect a little too much of you, I must really say it is your own fault, because by the goodness of God you have accomplished what I never dreamt you could have accomplished. All the time this chapel was building I trembled; nobody knows what I experienced. So I must mind, then, that I am not immoderate in my expectations. You have done what I thought never could be done; but bless the Lord it is done, and it is not to be undone. But coming back to this doctrine of forgiveness, I like the words of Pope very much,—

"Teach me to feel another's woe,
And hide the fault I see;
That mercy I to others show,
That mercy show to me."

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." The beautiful testimonies we have recently had before the church, and some more yet coming forward, have impressed my mind, and rather led to these remarks. There is something very pleasant, therefore, in Christian love. The sight of you sometimes individually, if I meet you anywhere, any of you, associates in my mind your love to the truth, and your belonging to the Surrey Tabernacle. Then you would not love them so much if they belonged anywhere else. I should not know so much of them, you see, friends; that is where it is. You do like those best that you know the most of, and that are the most kind to you. It is all delusion to say it is

not so; I can enter into the feeling of an old Grecian philosopher, when one said, "You would make a good magistrate if you were not so partial," and he in his classic language replied, "The gods forbid I should occupy a tribunal in which I could show no more favour to my friends than to strangers." You may say that is partial; well, be it what it may, I will confess that is my feeling. If there were two persons needing a favour, and I could grant it only to one, and the one were one of you, and the other a stranger, I know which I would grant it to. If it is an infirmity, it is so. I quite adopt the language of Watts'—

" My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends and kindred dwell,
There God my Saviour reigns."

Ever since I have been in the ministry I have felt my sympathies immoveably fixed on the people of God; and I attribute my success partly to that. And I do solemnly believe, without saying anything unkind, if some of our ministers had shown a little less wavering, and a little less inclination to please the Pharisee, and to find fault with the infirm and tried child of God, and a little more decision for the man that is fallen among thieves, a little more of the spirit of the Samaritan, it would have been better for them. The Samaritan did not say to the man, Do you belong to a certain party? do you go to a certain place? No; he saw there were the wounds, and did all that could be done. And if we do not wish to be good Samaritans, if we were in the plight of the man that fell among thieves—and we might be some day, we cannot say; we are not our own keepers,—we should be very glad for a good Samaritan to come to us then. Therefore "do unto others as ye would they should do unto you;"—"he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." When you have once received a person in truth and in love, then stick to him, abide by him, be firm; let your sympathies be with him. The Pharisee, in many respects, may outshine the child of God; but that Pharisee carries by his side the spear, ever ready to pierce the side of truth, he carries with him under his tongue the venom of asps; he carries with him, with all his creature smoothness, spotlessness, and excellency, the gall of bitterness, of enmity against God. Therefore, give me the infirm Christian rather than the shining hypocrite; let me have the man that knows what he is, is humbled down, stands out for God's truth;—that is the man that will go triumphant to heaven; while the self-justiciary, self-sanctifying, and self-gratulatory, that is the man that will be lost.

" Sinners can say, and only they,
How precious is the Saviour!"

It really is a good thing that Rahab went to heaven when she did; for if she were living now, she would stand a poor chance, a very poor chance indeed; there is hardly mercy enough now to reach a sinner half so great as she was; but mercy did reach her, and now her happy spirit is before God's eternal throne, one with the spirits of the just made perfect. Ah, the dear Saviour! What an example hath He set us in receiving sinners, pardoning, cleansing, exalting them, bringing them up to sit together in heavenly places with himself for ever. Brotherly love, then. At our last church meeting we heard sixteen good testimonies—sixteen good sermons, and we felt all the better for it; at least, I did. Last Friday night I went home better in mind and body for my sermon, if it did nobody else good. At the church meeting one brought a little incense, another a little oil, another a little wine, another a little fruit, another a cup of cold water to cool one's feverish tongue; so that when the sixteen sermons were ended, I felt all the better for them. That is the way in which brotherly unity takes place. It is in this truth and love that it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity.