**Hindrances to Unity**

by H. E. Phillips

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:2,3).

The idea of religious unity has created many movements toward that end, some of them creating even more discord and party spirit. The religious world today is terribly divided over many matters. Even in the church there are parties that expel any resemblance of the unity taught in the New Testament.

The very term "denomination" strongly implies division. It refers to different religious bodies called by different names to distinguish them. Division is condemned by the Holy Spirit. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." (Rom. 16:17). "Now 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." (I Cor. 1:10). By the questions: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized the name of Paul?" (vs. 13) the apostle shows the absurdity of division growing out of the doctrine of Christ.

Unity is a part of the doctrine of Christ. He prayed that those who believe on Him should be one in the same way and sense that Christ and the Father are one. (John 17:20,20). We are to endeavor to KEEP THE UNITY of the Spirit. We are to try (test) the spirits to know whether they are of God or men. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1).

In spite of these statements by the Holy Spirit and the efforts of godly men and women, there are some hindrances that stand in the way of true unity. I shall mention only two or three.

**1. Ignorance.** Many will accept the idea of unity in words, but because they do not know the doctrine of the New Testament they practice division. It takes more than word of mouth to accomplish unity among the disciples. Ignorance causes some to draw conclusions from partial evidence (they are not acquainted with the Bible to know all the evidence), and then demand that all others accept their conclusions. The idea that there are saved in all churches is not reached by studying the word of God. The doctrine that moral goodness is all that is required to effect unity does not come from the word of God. Ignorance of the nature and mission of the church of our Lord has caused much division, and it is the very foundation upon which the denominations are built today.

**2. Loyalty to men.** Paul warned of false teachers within the church who would lead others away from the truth. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30). Jesus gave a like warning: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7:15).

Loyalty to man is first based upon human wisdom and importance. Just because a certain man has a degree from some college of reputation, or because he is well-known throughout the nation, or because he has material wealth, it does not follow that his is right in his preaching. Human wisdom tends to elevate the man and decrease the importance of God's word. Loyalty to men causes many to accept just about any doctrine they preach, whether it is taught in the New Testament or not. This hinders true unity.

**3. Emotionalism.** The unnatural appeal to emotion is the usual course followed by false teachers. To millions the practice and destiny of their parents are of much more importance than what the word of God says. When emotion is aroused beyond its normal function, men and women will not listen to the Book of Books.

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**“Shamefastness” and Dress**

*by Jerry Fite*

In the context of holiness, Paul instructs women to *“...adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works”*(1 Timothy 2:9-10).

We communicate many things about ourselves through dress. It should not be surprising that the woman of a “wily” heart is dressed *“with the attire of a harlot”*(Proverbs 7:10). The disposition of heart not only finds expression in word but often it manifests its character in dress. The ostentatious or showy spirit often finds an outlet through extravagant hair styles, expensive jewelry and costly raiment. Paul is warning women readers to guard against inappropriate dress. How does he combat the problem? Fight fire with fire. An unbecoming spirit is behind inappropriate dress, so if we concentrate on having a right spirit when we dress, our adornment should be appropriate.

One characteristic of a holy and godly heart is “shamefastness”. According to Vine, this “is that modesty which is ‘fast” or rooted in the character.” Like “bedfast” is describing one confined to bed, “shamefast”” is modesty firmly imbedded in character. This godly heart understands the limits or boundaries of propriety and shrinks back from ever crossing the line instead of seeing how close one can come to the line. Shamefastness is that character of heart that is concerned with how certain actions will affect others. We see this clearly when Jesus speaks of the “importunity” or “shameless persistence” (the opposite of shamefastness) of one who approaches the door of a friend at midnight. He is persistent in asking for bread, but shamelessly so. He does not care if his friend is in bed at midnight with his children or what the friend will have to do to accommodate his request. He has no shame regarding how his actions are affecting his friend (Luke 11:5-8).

Our dress has an effect upon others. “Shamefastness” factors this in and makes sure the dress for the occasion will be fitting within the limits of propriety, therefore not adversely affecting others. Our purpose in assembling is to worship and honor God, not put on a show with the new fashions. Shamefastness does not keep women from new things, it keeps her within the limits of modest dress, that manifests sobriety. Her dress never distracts other worshipers from the lofty purpose of honoring God by bringing undue attention to herself, or attracting the envious or even lustful gaze of the distracted.

Warm weather also tempts the ostentatious and showy spirit to show off more of the body rather than keep it modestly covered. Shamefastness will not allow an ostentatious spirit to take root and find expression in skimpy clothing. The woman with shamefastness considers how shorts exposing the thighs; halter tops, attracting eyes to the bare midriff; or swimsuits boldly revealing the female form will attract the wrong kind of response from men. So, she avoids such attire before the public’s eye. The woman wanting to dress becomingly as one who is manifesting godliness can do so in any society. Developing shamefastness will help tremendously in dressing for all occasions.