

One in Christ

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It is only in and through our individual loyalty to and love of Jesus Christ that we can hope to be one.

As President Dallin H. Oaks has noted, today is Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week, marking the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His suffering in Gethsemane and death on the cross just days later, and His glorious Resurrection on Easter Sunday. Let us resolve never to forget what Christ endured to redeem us.¹ And let us never lose the overwhelming joy we will feel once again on Easter as we contemplate His victory over the grave and the gift of universal resurrection.

The evening before the trials and crucifixion that awaited Him, Jesus joined in a Passover meal with His Apostles. At the end of this Last Supper, in a sacred Intercessory Prayer, Jesus petitioned His Father in these words: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name [mine Apostles] whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."²

Then, tenderly, the Savior expanded His petition to include all believers:

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."³

Becoming one is a recurring theme in the gospel of Jesus Christ and in God's dealings with His children. With respect to the city of Zion in Enoch's day, it is said that "they were of one heart and one mind."⁴ Of the early Saints in the primitive Church of Jesus Christ, the New Testament records, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."⁵

In our own dispensation, the Lord admonished, "I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine."⁶ Among the reasons the Lord gave as to why the early Saints in Missouri had failed to establish a place of Zion was that they "are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom."⁷

Where God prevails in all hearts and minds, the people are described as “*in one*, the children of Christ.”⁸

When the resurrected Savior appeared to the ancient Book of Mormon peoples, He noted with disapproval that in the past there had been disputations among the people about baptism and other matters. He commanded:

“There shall be no disputations among you, as there have hitherto been; neither shall there be disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine, as there have hitherto been.

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention.”⁹

In our extremely contentious world, how can unity be achieved, especially in the Church, where we are to have “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”?¹⁰ Paul gives us the key:

“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ.”¹¹

We are too diverse and at times too discordant to be able to come together as one on any other basis or under any other name. Only in Jesus Christ can we truly become one.

Becoming one in Christ happens one by one—we each begin with ourselves. We are dual beings of flesh and spirit and are sometimes at war within ourselves. As Paul expressed:

“For I delight in the law of God after the inward man;

“But I see another law in [the] members [of my body], warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.”¹²

Jesus was also a being of flesh and spirit. He was tested; He understands; He can help us achieve unity within.¹³ Therefore, drawing upon the light and the grace of Christ, we strive to give our spirit—and the Holy Spirit—dominance over the physical. And when we fall short, Christ, by His Atonement, has given us the gift of repentance and the opportunity to try again.

If individually we each “put on Christ,” then together we can hope to become one, as Paul said, “the body of Christ.”¹⁴ To “put on Christ” certainly includes making His “first and great commandment”¹⁵ our first and greatest commitment, and if we love God, we will keep His commandments.¹⁶

Unity with our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ grows as we heed the second commandment—inextricably connected to the first—to love others as ourselves.¹⁷ And I suppose an even more perfect unity would obtain among us if we followed the Savior’s higher and holier expression of this second commandment—to love one another not only as we love ourselves but as *He* loved us.¹⁸ In sum, it is “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.”¹⁹

President Marion G. Romney, a former counselor in the First Presidency, in explaining how enduring peace and unity are obtained, said:

“If a single person, yielding to Satan, is filled with the works of the flesh, he wars within himself. If two yield, they each war within themselves and fight with each other. If many people yield, a society [reaps] the harvest of great stress and contention. If the rulers of a country yield, there is world-wide contention.”

President Romney continued: “As the works of the flesh have universal application, so likewise does the gospel of peace. If one man lives it, he has peace within himself. If two men live it, they each have peace within themselves and with each other. If the citizens live it, the nation has domestic peace. When there are enough nations enjoying the fruit of the Spirit to control world affairs, then, and only then, will the war-drums throb no longer, and the battle flags be furl’d. ... (See Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Locksley Hall,” *The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson*, ed. W. J. Rolfe, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1898, p. 93, lines 27–28.)”²⁰

When we “put on Christ,” it becomes possible either to resolve or to lay aside differences, disagreements, and disputes. A rather dramatic example of overcoming division is found in our Church history. Elder Brigham Henry Roberts (commonly known as B. H. Roberts), born in England in 1857, served as a member of the First Council of the Seventy—what we refer to today as the Presidency of the Seventy. Elder Roberts was an able and tireless defender of the restored gospel and of the Church in some of its most difficult times.

In 1895, however, Elder Roberts’s service in the Church was put in jeopardy by contention. B. H. had been appointed as a delegate to the convention that drafted a constitution for Utah when it became a state. Afterward, he decided to become a candidate for the United States Congress but did not notify or seek permission from the First Presidency. President Joseph F. Smith, a counselor in the First Presidency, censured B. H. for that failure in a general priesthood meeting. Elder Roberts lost the election and felt his defeat was due in large part to President Smith’s statements. He was critical of Church

leaders in some political speeches and interviews. He withdrew from active Church service. In a lengthy meeting in the Salt Lake Temple with members of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve, B. H. remained adamant in justifying himself. Later, “President [Wilford] Woodruff gave [Elder Roberts] three weeks to reconsider his position. If he remained unrepentant, they would release him from the Seventy.”²¹

In a subsequent private meeting with Apostles Heber J. Grant and Francis Lyman, B. H. was initially unyielding, but love and the Holy Spirit ultimately prevailed. Tears came to his eyes. The two Apostles were able to respond to certain perceived slights and offenses that troubled B. H., and they left with a heartfelt plea for reconciliation. The next morning, after lengthy prayer, Elder Roberts sent a note to Elders Grant and Lyman that he was prepared to reunite with his brethren.²²

When he later met with the First Presidency, Elder Roberts said, “I went to the Lord and received light and instruction through His Spirit to submit to the authority of God.”²³ Motivated by his love of God, B. H. Roberts remained a faithful and an able Church leader to the end of his life.²⁴

We can also see in this example that unity does not mean simply agreeing that everyone should do his or her own thing or go his or her own way. We cannot be one unless we all bend our efforts to the common cause. It means, in B. H. Roberts’s words, submitting to the authority of God. We are different members of the body of Christ, fulfilling different functions at different times—the ear, the eye, the head, the hand, the feet—yet all of one body.²⁵ Therefore, our goal is “that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”²⁶

Unity does not require sameness, but it does require harmony. We can have our hearts knit together in love, be one in faith and doctrine, and still cheer for different teams, disagree on various political issues, debate about goals and the right way to achieve them, and many other such things. But we can never disagree or contend with anger or contempt for one another. Said the Savior:

“For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

“Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away.”²⁷

A year ago, President Russell M. Nelson pled with us in these words: “None of us can control nations or the actions of others or even members of our own families. But we can control ourselves. My call

today, dear brothers and sisters, is to end conflicts that are raging in *your* heart, *your* home, and *your* life. Bury any and all inclinations to hurt others—whether those inclinations be a temper, a sharp tongue, or a resentment for someone who has hurt you. The Savior commanded us to turn the other cheek [see 3 Nephi 12:39], to love our enemies, and to pray for those who spitefully use us [see 3 Nephi 12:44].”²⁸

I say again that it is only in and through our individual loyalty to and love of Jesus Christ that we can hope to be one—one within, one at home, one in the Church, eventually one in Zion, and above all, one with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

I return to the events of Holy Week and the ultimate triumph of our Redeemer. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ bears witness of His divinity and that He has overcome all things. His Resurrection bears witness that, bound to Him by covenant, we too may overcome all things and become one. His Resurrection bears witness that through Him, immortality and eternal life are realities.

This morning, I bear witness of His literal Resurrection and all that it implies, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Doctrine and Covenants 19:18–19.
2. John 17:11.
3. John 17:20–21.
4. Moses 7:18.
5. Acts 4:32.
6. Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.
7. Doctrine and Covenants 105:4.
8. 4 Nephi 1:17, emphasis added; see also Mosiah 5:7.
9. 3 Nephi 11:28–29.
10. Ephesians 4:5.
11. Galatians 3:27–28.
12. Romans 7:22–23.
13. See Hebrews 4:15: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”
14. See 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, 27.

15. See Matthew 22:37–38.
16. See John 14:15.
17. See Matthew 22:39.
18. See John 15:12.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 82:19.
20. Marion G. Romney, “The Price of Peace,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1983, 6.
21. See *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 3, *Boldly, Nobly, and Independently, 1893–1955* (2022), 42–45.
22. See *Saints*, 3:45–46.
23. B. H. Roberts, in *Saints*, 3:47.
24. Interestingly, B. H. Roberts ran for Congress again in 1898, this time with First Presidency consent, and was elected. Given the deep prejudice against the Church at that time, however, and the fact that he had engaged in plural marriage, the House of Representatives refused to seat him. Nevertheless, in hearings before the House regarding his service, B. H. was an eloquent and impassioned defender of the Church and its doctrine. (See *Saints*, 3:83–86; Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* [1980], 241–72.)
25. See 1 Corinthians 12:14–27.
26. 1 Corinthians 12:25.
27. 3 Nephi 11:29–30.
28. Russell M. Nelson, “The Power of Spiritual Momentum,” *Liahona*, May 2022, 97; emphasis in original.