

The Secret of True Unity

A study presented by Andreas Dura on October 9, 2004

Let's open our Bibles to the story of Mary and Martha. In *The Desire of Ages*, Mary's name is listed first as if she were the older of the two, or as if she was the person of distinction and Martha was only associated with her.

Luke 10

³⁸ Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house.

³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.

⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.

⁴¹ And Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things.

⁴² But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.

Do any of you hear the Spirit speaking to you in these verses? Who feels as though they are like Mary, and who feels as though they are like Martha? I realize that no one wants to praise himself, therefore I expect that none of you will quickly answer that you believe yourself to be like Mary. But what is deep in your heart? How often do you think that you are like Mary?

The Desire to Ages, p. 524:

Among the most steadfast of Christ's disciples was Lazarus of Bethany. From their first meeting his faith in Christ had been strong; his love for Him was deep, and he was greatly beloved by the Saviour. It was for Lazarus that the greatest of Christ's miracles was performed. The Saviour blessed all who sought His help; He loves all the human family, but to some He is bound by peculiarly tender associations. His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany, and for one of them His most wonderful work was

wrought.

At the home of Lazarus, Jesus had often found rest. The Saviour had no home of His own; He was dependent on the hospitality of His friends and disciples, and often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household, away from the suspicion and jealousy of the angry Pharisees. Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, holy friendship. Here He could speak with simplicity and perfect freedom, knowing that His words would be understood and treasured.

Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection. Those who received the heavenly instruction He was always ready to impart were greatly blessed.

As the multitudes followed Christ through the open fields, He unfolded to them the beauties of the natural world. He sought to open the eyes of their understanding, that they might see how the hand of God upholds the world. In order to call out an appreciation of God's goodness and benevolence, He called the attention of His hearers to the gently falling dew, to the soft showers of rain and the bright sunshine, given alike to good and evil. He desired men to realize more fully the regard that God bestows on the human instrumentalities He has created.

But the multitudes were slow of hearing, and in the home at Bethany Christ found rest from the weary conflict of public life. Here He opened to an appreciative audience the volume of Providence. In these private interviews He unfolded to His hearers that which He did not attempt to tell to the mixed multitude. He needed not to speak to His friends in parables.

Jesus often visited this home where He felt comfortable, because there was true unity. Lazarus, Martha, and Mary had unity with each other, and unity with God. And consequently they had unity with Christ. This experience of unity was strengthening to Christ.

Children who attend public school experience no unity there. In the world there is no real unity. There is strife, fights,

war, and everyone is seeking the highest place. And what do our children naturally want when they come home? Unity.

Let's compare unity with a tree. It has a root, trunk, leaves, etc. It starts under the ground and grows upward. We want to take the points in what we have read so far and compare them with a tree.

One point that wasn't mentioned is unselfishness. You probably realize already that this point is part of the story even though it wasn't expressly stated. We know that books are kept in heaven which give an accurate report of everything everyone does, both good and bad. And what is the title which stands at the head of every sin? Selfishness. Correspondingly, on the side of every good deed stands the title, Unselfishness. Unselfishness, therefore, must be the foundation for true unity. And on the other side, selfishness must be the foundation for disunity.

Lazarus, Martha, and Mary had strong faith. We read of the deep love they had for Jesus, and also of Jesus' answering chord in response. We also see sincerity and honesty. These three followers of Christ were completely honest with each other and with Christ.

Restfulness held sway in this home. Outside of this home was much unrest. The Pharisees loudly argued with each other in the streets in order to show how righteous they were. They wanted to argue with Jesus in the same way. They actually thought they were really righteous because they were arguing about religious things. But how different was everything in this quiet home. There was real rest, not just physically. There was real peace in this home. When Jesus came there, He felt at ease.

There was no jealousy in this home. No one was striving for the highest place. Even the disciples had this problem, but no such thing existed in this home.

There was no mistrust there. There was real trust in each other and in Christ. Such an atmosphere is peaceful.

There was no anger there. They didn't get angry over little things or anything, but rather, they were simply happy and content that Jesus was there.

They sincerely accepted Christ. They didn't accept Him with any reserves. They didn't watch and wait to see how things would turn out first before they accepted Him. They accepted Him out of love.

Between each other and between them and Christ was a pure, holy friendship. In addition, they appreciated the truth which Jesus gave them.

Out of all of these grew affection, courtesy, devotion, and understanding. They understood each other right away. They didn't have to explain themselves. And when Jesus visited, they understood Him too. Therefore, He didn't have to speak to them in parables and explain things again and again. He didn't have to deal with objections and contradictions. These didn't exist. In a simple, childlike manner they accepted everything Christ said to them. At the same time, they were courteous, devoted, and so on.

Satan saw all of this, and he knew that Jesus could recuperate there, and recover from the constant battle He had with the Pharisees. Therefore, he wanted to destroy this beautiful unity. To some degree he succeeded by actually killing Lazarus with a disease. Jesus allowed Satan to carry out his purpose.

But Satan tried to destroy this unity in an even worse way. He tried to stir up strife, to drive a wedge, which we have just read about. In this story an incident occurred among them. First there was irritation. Martha was irritated or bothered, because Mary was not doing her duty.

When irritation arises, the next thing is rejection. After re-

jection comes jealousy. Then comes distrust. Then there is a loss of rest. Soon follows insincerity. There is a loss of appreciation. Friendship turns to animosity. Misunderstanding takes the place of understanding. Affection, courtesy, and devotion disappear. Instead of strong faith there is weak faith. Instead of deep love there is superficial love. And why does all of this happen? Because of selfishness. That is the heading over every sin. It is the root of every sin.

Let's read about this change which took place and how Satan caused it:

The Desire of Ages, p. 525:

As Christ gave His wonderful lessons, Mary sat at His feet, a reverent and devoted listener. On one occasion Martha, perplexed with the care of preparing the meal, went to Christ, saying, "Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me."

In other words, "Look, we have things to do. That's plain to be seen. And she is lazy. She should be helping."

This was the time of Christ's first visit to Bethany. The Saviour and His disciples had just made the toilsome journey on foot from Jericho. Martha was anxious to provide for their comfort, and in her anxiety she forgot the courtesy due to her Guest. Jesus answered her with mild and patient words, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Mary was storing her mind with the precious words falling from the Saviour's lips, words that were more precious to her than earth's most costly jewels.

Are we looking at two different forms of service, a Martha service, and a Mary service? Can we say that here are two facets of the same thing? Can we say that Martha and Mary each have their place?

Let's read further about Martha in the Old Testament. There are other Marthas in the Bible. And then we will read

about another Mary in order to better understand the matter.

Genesis 18

¹ Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.

² So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground,

³ And said, My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.

⁴ Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.

⁵ And I will bring a morsel of bread that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant. They said, Do as you have said.

⁶ So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, Quickly, make ready three measures of fine meal; knead it and make cakes.

⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd, took a tender and good calf, gave it to a young man, and he hastened to prepare it.

⁸ So he took butter and milk and the calf which he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree as they ate.

That wasn't just a slice of bread; it certainly would have taken considerable time to prepare. During this time they all had to wait. Abraham didn't know who they were, but they were angels. To him they were strangers passing by. It was customary in the Orient to practice this kind of hospitality. When strangers came by, it was unthought of not to entertain them.

“My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant.” He said, “my lord”. He really wanted them to stay a while. Then everything was set in motion, and the whole meal was prepared. When everything was ready and the guests ate, Abraham did not join them but stood by. This is an expression of humility and hospitality.

Hebrews 13

² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

This was certainly the case here with Abraham. Was Abraham a Martha? Definitely. Martha would have done exactly the same thing. What did Martha do? She prepared the meal. She organized everything. She was efficient. And she was considerate of her Guest's physical needs. She respected her Guest and honored Him.

Now we would like to consider Mary.

John 4

⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give Me a drink.

Did she fulfill the request? No, she forgot it. She never did give Him a drink of water. When they were finished with their conversation, she left. She did not carry out the usual hospitality which it was customary in the Orient to do. Her first reaction to the request was amazement because Christ was a Jew and she a Samaritan. Then Jesus talked about the living water which prompted her to ask questions. After Jesus finished, she left.

John 4

²⁵ The woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things.

²⁶ Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am He.

²⁷ And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, What do You seek? or, Why are You talking with her?

²⁸ The woman then left her waterpot...

She left it standing. She didn't draw any water.

²⁸ ...and went her way into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?

Was Jesus left here to remain thirsty? Wasn't this impolite? The disciples said to Him later, "Come, You need to eat something. You haven't eaten for a while."

John 4

³⁴ Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.

The woman had given Him something to drink, but it was something different; that is, she listened to Jesus. She yielded unreservedly. She believed. And she valued Jesus as the Messenger of God.

Is this two different ways of serving? Is there a Martha way and a Mary way?

We should not be satisfied with our condition, whether we identify with either Mary or Martha. We should actually ask the question, "How can I improve my service?" If I am like Martha, what can I learn yet? And if I think that I am like Mary, what do I have yet to learn? Those who are quick to identify with Mary, also have problems. Perhaps they are not actually like Mary. We need to take a hard look at this.

The Desire of Ages, p. 525:

The "one thing" that Martha needed was a calm, devotional spirit, a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement. She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever.

And here is the secret of why we so easily identify with Mary. We are quick to recognize the Marthas among us, and we want them to be corrected, or slowed down anyhow.

She needed less anxiety for the things which pass away, and more for those things which endure forever. Jesus would teach His children to seize every opportunity of gaining that knowledge which will make them wise unto salvation.

The cause of Christ needs careful, energetic workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas, with their zeal in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Je-

sus. Let diligence, promptness, and energy be sanctified by the grace of Christ; then the life will be an unconquerable power for good.

We want to learn something from both Martha and Mary. First we want to learn what we should not be. What can we learn from Martha? What was her problem? We just read it.

“Martha was anxious to provide for their [physical] comfort...”

In itself this is not wrong, but she became too wrapped up with the physical side of things and forgot the spiritual. This was her problem. She lost her restful, devotional spirit. She needed

“...a deeper anxiety for knowledge concerning the future, immortal life, and the graces necessary for spiritual advancement.”

And lastly, she neglected her opportunity. It was truly a golden opportunity when Jesus was there. This reminds us of the disciples after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. They came together and reproached themselves for not having recognized and taken advantage of their golden opportunity when He was among them. Surely at that time Martha would also have recognized her missed opportunity.

She even became jealous. We can hear her saying,

“Master, what are You doing there? You are allowing her to sit at Your feet.”

In reality this is jealousy even if it doesn’t appear so. And disunity follows jealousy. She lost her unity with Mary. Likewise, she lost her unity with Jesus, and she herself saw this since she was disagreeing with Jesus.

When any of the building blocks of unity are not there, then other things are not right as well. The whole tree is not right. In the end, the root of unselfishness is no longer there. This is what happened to Martha. But she couldn’t see this.

She thought she was unselfish in her service to Christ. And so she reproached Mary for not helping her when there was so much to do. All of this was Martha's problem.

Let's go over this again:

1. She was concerned about the physical, but not the spiritual. She lost sight of the spiritual.
2. She lost that restful, devotional spirit.
3. She lost concern about a knowledge of the future, eternal life.
4. She lost sight of the graces necessary for spiritual advancement.
5. She neglected her opportunity.
6. She became jealous.
7. She lost her unity with Mary and Christ.
8. She reproached Mary.
9. Then an unpleasant atmosphere developed as a result of all this: an atmosphere of strife.

Now we want to look at the problem of those who think they are like Mary. I don't mean those who have Mary's problem. I can't see that Mary had a problem. If she had done anything wrong, Jesus would have certainly said something. Jesus said that she had chosen the better part. In this case it was not impolite not to help Martha. On the contrary, it was impolite of Martha not to sit at Jesus' feet. Jesus' words actually make this plain. However, we often think that we are like Mary when we aren't. What then is our problem when we identify with her?

One who identifies with Mary will say,

"I don't become anxious about physical things above the spiritual. I don't worry. Things will work out. I don't get gray hairs when visitors come and I don't have anything to give them. That's not a problem to me. That way of thinking is for Marthas. They are extreme and fanatical and so on. I won't worry about it. I'm easy. I'm like Mary."

This isn't a bad attitude, is it? At least you won't get old fast. But it doesn't result in true unity.

Those who think they are like Mary, have no spiritual goal. But it goes further. They actually have rebellion in their hearts. In heart they reproach the Marthas. Mary did not reproach Martha for being so busy. Mary might have even had a bad conscience as she heard Martha. She probably expected Jesus to say, "Mary. Get to work now." And immediately she would have started helping.

This is how Mary would have thought. But those who "think" that they are like Mary, do not think this way. Rather, they have no real concern for the physical or the spiritual. They are prepared to read religious material for hours, but they don't really advance in spiritual things.

They don't have a definite goal to develop the diligence and efficiency of Martha. They are satisfied with a low standard. They just don't have a goal. They neglect the opportunity to learn from Martha. They don't want to learn anything from her. They think "That is too extreme". In reality, they are selfish. They are even jealous. And they accuse Martha of being too strict.

Finally, they are in disharmony with the Church. When the work grows and moves forward, when it calls us to join in and give up the old ways and obey the Spirit of Prophecy, then those who think they are like Mary find themselves in disharmony with the Church. And that is a problem. Their attitude and beliefs create no unity.

So, that is the battle of disunity. The one side says, We are like Martha, and the other side says, We are like Mary. They are like two people with bow and arrow pointing at each other. The one says, "You are Martha. You should be shot." And the other says, "You are Mary. You should be shot." This is how the two sides fight against each other.

So, should we seek unity on some middle ground somewhere? The secret of unity is not a middle ground in between two wrong positions.

The secret of true unity has actually been stated here. It is the true spirit of Mary. Mary was not disorganized. She was not lazy. She was not without a goal. She was not negligent of her Guest and His comfort. Not at all. She simply had her priorities straight. That was the deciding point. And that is what we need.

The Marthas need to have the true spirit that Mary had. And those who think they are like Mary, need to have the true spirit of Mary.

In every situation we must decide between less important things and more important things. We need to set correct priorities. And what should have the highest priority? The development of our character. In all that we do, we need to recognize that the physical things are side issues, and that our character is the main point. Likewise, when we decide not to do something, we should make this decision with our character development as the main reason for our decision.

If what we do will hurt our character, then we have made a wrong choice. If that is the case, then we need to learn to make better choices. And if what we do develops our character in right lines, then we have made the correct choice. This means that Mary's character improved as a result of her choice to sit at Jesus' feet. And Martha's character could have improved as well as a result of what she was doing, but this spirit of discontent, this lack of concern for the spiritual is what hurt her character.

We must first sit at the feet of Jesus. That means that when we serve, it is good, but first we need to obtain power through prayer. Only that which is accomplished as a result of the power that comes from prayer will bring good fruit in the end. Everything else will bring bad fruit. After we have truly

prayed, then we can go to work with action and diligence. And we should be diligent. We should learn from Martha.

That means that in our lives there should be a connection between the grace of Christ and punctuality, diligence, and endurance. Then our lives will be an unconquerable power for good.

We must ever keep in mind that unselfish ministry comes from a living connection with Christ. That is the secret of true unity.

I wish that this story of Martha and Mary will ever be before our eyes so that we will attain to true unity, so that our homes will be saturated with a peace that comforts our children. They will be comforted when there are two things: an atmosphere of the love of Christ, and physical order and efficiency.

I would like to say it again. When the children come home from school, they come from an environment of disunity, not unity. When we come home from our work in the world, we come from an environment of disunity, not unity. In school and at our work in the world, we usually don't find diligence, endurance, perseverance, or punctuality. Although sometimes things in the world run better than in our homes. And that is sad.

But when the children can come home to a place where they can be comforted by the true spirit of love as well as physical order, then they will grow in character.

It is my prayer that our homes and our Church will become just this kind of environment, so that the true followers of Christ can feel at home.