

THE TIE THAT BINDS

“By faithfulness we are collected and wound up into unity within ourselves, whereas we had been scattered abroad in multiplicity.”

- Saint Augustine

“Collected and wound up” describes unity or harmony; it is a description of the all working for the whole; each contributing to the best interest of the group or community.

“The Tie that Binds” has several possible meanings although it insinuates the link or common thread that bounds two or more things together. This title has several possible associations although, for me, it is the classic Christian song, “Bless be the tie that binds” written by John Fawcett and scored by Hans G. Hageli (1782); and to give all due credit, the song was later arranged by Lowell Mason for *The Psalter* (1845) and was used in at least one movie – to include *Our Town* (1940).

Since Saint Augustine lived long before the song was written (354 – 430), his words (above) cannot have had the song in mind; and before attempting to drive some association between the two, let me take a look at the possible meaning behind his statement above – his description of *the tie that binds*.

To begin, who is he addressing; or who is the audience of this statement or acclamation? Who is “we” and “ourselves”? Does he mean the church, a church, a group of fellow clergy, or something or someone else? To answer these questions and to understanding the meaning of his statement would help if we knew the context and we knew the author. I don’t really know either, unfortunately; however, in the balance of this writing, will give it my best to understand – or at least comment – on the possible meaning.

Whether his statement refers to one or a collective, the *tie* is the described faithfulness – or the trust in something or someone we cannot see or fully comprehend. The scriptures remind us that that, for those who believe in Christ, faith was (and is) the means to salvation or the admission and acceptance of Christ as Lord. To be enjoined by this faith is to be one with the others who share in this same faith. Faith is the tie that binds us to God – that, in turn, binds us to the family of God, the authentic church. Faith leads to action that includes the works we perform as a consequence – to include the practice or corporate worship in both the physical, tangible church and

the spiritual church or *bride of Jesus*. Without faith, there is no salvation; and without salvation, there is no unification or enjoining of the church body (which he may be describing as “collected” and “would up”). Yet the truth is that the body or church is scattered or dispersed; it is not in the same locality or region.

Saint Augustine purportedly believed in both the physical and the spiritual church: the tangible or *visible* church that ministers and performs sacraments, and the *invisible church* described as the body of the elect known only to God. I believe that, in regard to the statement, his message pertained to the *invisible church* – or those well beyond his awareness, though certainly known by God as his children, the faithful.



When Dr. John Fawcett wrote the words of “Blest be the tie that binds”, he was leaving one *physical* church and going to another. The occasioned was undoubtedly sad for all; in this sentiment, he changed his mind and elected to stay. Commemorating the event, he wrote the song with the following words:

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Before our Father’s throne
We pour our ardent prayers;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one
Our comforts and our cares.

We share each other’s woes,
Our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

When we asunder part,
It gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart,
And hope to meet again.

This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way;
While each in expectation lives,
And longs to see the day.

From sorrow, toil and pain,
And sin, we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

In this song is such faith on departing, that no matter the condition (of separation or “being scattered abroad”, there remains the “kindred minds” that “share in each other’s woes”.

It is so little faith that can *move mountains* (as we are told); and yet, how often my faith seems to come under fire – and the only choice is really to endure the faith-building losses or distresses of life by faith. Also, to remember that their kinship with those I know and the many I don’t know...but God’s knows.