

Ecumenical Movement

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer critiques the ecumenical movement, emphasizing the importance of biblical truth and the true unity of believers in Christ.

Duration: 40:28

Scripture: Jeremiah 20:9, Matthew 18:12, Revelation 17:5

Topics: "Ecumenical Movement"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of being conscious of Christ's presence in our lives. He encourages the congregation to become Christ-conscious and church-loving, leading to a transformation of their lives and hearts. The preacher advises against joining any group or belief system that questions the truth of the Bible. He uses an illustration of a man and a girl in love, separated by distance but connected by looking at the same moon, to illustrate the idea of believers looking at Jesus and being united in Him.

Transcript

There is a verse in the second chapter of Acts, verse forty-four, it says, And all that believed were together, and had all things common. Now, that's the little story of the unity of believers immediately after Pentecost. One of the dearest doctrines in the scriptures, and one of the dearest to me personally, is the doctrine of the unity of the members of the Church of Christ.

Not only one with each other, but one with Christ. And I sometimes tell people that I think in our family that we have quite a demonstration of at least interdenominationalism. My wife grew up a Presbyterian, and I met her in the Methodist Church, and we entered immediately after an Alliance Church.

Her oldest son and his family go to a Quaker church in California. The next son attends with his family a Presbyterian church, and the next son teaches Sunday school in a Baptist church, and his people go there. Another son is affiliated with a Presbyterian church.

The youngest son is a Presbyterian preacher. My daughter is taking her training and expects to go to the field as a missionary under the Christian Missionary Alliance. And I don't know what I am.

That's the ecumenical movement in practice. Now, I really want to preach to you to warm your hearts a bit out of this 2nd chapter of Acts. But since we're hearing a lot about it, I thought that I would talk a little bit

about the ecumenical movement which is abroad.

It won't be anything like a scholarly discourse, nor will it be a history of the movement. But it will only be an effort to show that there is a movement which I believe is not of God, and then there is a unity, a universal oneness which is of God. In the first place, the ecumenical is a word which, if you are subject to the influence of British-speaking people or are yourself English, you will call it ecumenical.

But ecumenical doesn't sound right to me, so I call it ecumenical, and I think that most people on the continent do. I know they do, and I will call it ecumenical, giving it the soft E instead of the hard one. Some of you are so busy with your housework and your work generally that you pay little attention to it.

But there is a movement on, and has been on for some time, to bring all the Church into one organization. This ecumenical idea, of course all the word ecumenical means is universal all over the earth. That's all it means.

But it has been adapted to mean that all over the earth, wherever there is an ecumenical council, it doesn't mean that the whole Church, if there is a council, say as there will be next Thursday beginning in Rome, if there is an ecumenical council, it doesn't mean that all the Church is there, but it means that the representatives of the whole Church is there. This ecumenical council is to be held in Rome starting next Thursday. It will take a long time to complete its work.

There will be over 2800 delegates, and they will deal with 70 different items on their agenda. And the most important one, unless I miss my time, will be the one they call the unity of all Christians. And I have noticed that they are now getting very broad, and they are calling it, they say that they are willing to put more emphasis on scripture.

Now, that to my mind is bait to catch suckers, to put more emphasis on scripture, because our friends over on the papal side of the road, if scripture has it one way and the Catholic tradition has it another, the Catholic tradition will win out all the time. But if they can say that they are willing to give more emphasis to the scripture in the Church in order to woo the Protestants who love the scriptures, of course, they'll do that. Now, the Protestants also.

Of course, the ecumenical councils have been all down the centuries. That is, the councils held by the Roman Church, in which there were delegates from all over the world, and they settled all kinds of questions, and sometimes they didn't set the right thing. But then we have a movement among the Protestants, and that movement among the Protestants has some aims.

One of the aims I don't believe in at all, because I think it's already been fulfilled. Our Lord, you know, when he prayed his prayer, our brother quoted it tonight, it said that they all may be one. Jesus wanted his Church to be one, and he prayed that way.

And now they are coming to me, and they are saying, you ought to join our organization for the unification of believers, so that the prayer of Jesus would be fulfilled. Now, I'd like to tell you this, that if it takes Jesus Christ 1,900 years to get his prayer answered for the unity of his Church, and if the Church all down the centuries hasn't been answered and they have not yet become unified, then my faith in the Lord would suffer a staggering blow. The simple fact is that the prayer of Jesus, that they might all be one, when all that were believers were baptized by the Holy Ghost into one body.

But then there are those who, while they wouldn't say that this is their reason, they just want everybody to get together all alike. And there have been some mergers, you know. There have been quite a number of mergers in recent times, and some of them have been all alike.

That is, they are all believers and they all get together, instead of having two heads and two headquarters and two official magazines and why they only have one. That's always to be desired. For 25 years I have worked on this thing of trying to get the Christian Missionary Alliance to unite with the Missionary Church Association.

It looks now as if they will. But then you could put the Missionary Church people and the Alliance people in a sack and shake them up and you wouldn't know one from the other, because we do believe the same thing. We are simply Christians, and so when we would unite or merge, there would be no sacrifice of any vital theology at all.

Then there are others who believe that Christians ought to get together and thus fulfill the prayer of Christ, even if they had to sacrifice truth. It started in Amsterdam in 1948, a great world movement called the World Council of Churches. You have never heard me say anything against it.

I don't make it a practice to preach sermons against things. As I have said, I am 99 percent for things and 1 percent against. But this happens to be one of the things that I am against.

The Anglicans and the Eastern Orthodox and the Protestants and the old Catholics got together. Then after that, into the World Council there have come denominations, or at least whole parts of denominations, until it's a vast ball. And now the pressure is on from many directions, especially from Rome.

That smiling, rather overweight gentleman in the Vatican is a kindly old fellow. You know, it wouldn't be bad to talk to him. I'd like to talk to him, pointing to Jesus.

But he said, you know, that here I am at the end of the road and on the top of the heap. He said that after he got elected Pope. Now, that was a human thing to say.

There hadn't been anything human come out of the Vatican, at least during the time that the previous Pope was in. He couldn't. He had big glasses and big eyes and a sober look.

But this fellow is a nice old fellow. But he wants us all to get together. And he's saying that he thinks the union of all Christians is one thing that he wants to try to promote.

And he'd love to bring it about and go down history. Now, one thing that we ought to remember, my dear friends, is that the unity of the Christian Church in the Spirit is one thing, but the union of all Christian groups is quite another thing altogether. We ought to remember the doctrine of the apostasy found in the scriptures.

There is a doctrine there that says that the time will come, perhaps I could read just a few verses of it. It says that the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, preach the word, be it in season or out of season, reprove and rebuke and exhort with all own suffering in doctrine, for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. But after their own, alas, they shall eat to themselves, teachers having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from fables.

Now, that's what the man of God said. And there's much else there also, where it said that the time would come when men would be lovers of their own selves, and they denied having the form of God in them, but denying the power thereof. And he said, from such turn away.

You see, there is a difference between Christendom and the Church. What the present ecumenical push is trying to do is to solidify Christendom, to bring us all who are on the Christian side of things at all, that is, the Western world and all Christians of any sort, to bring them together in one vast body. That's Christendom.

But there is in the scriptures a great difference between Christendom and the Church. And the Church teaches that Christendom shall be apostate, and shall give up her faith, and shall wallow in her own self-righteousness, and shall deny the power, and shall be totally unprepared for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Son of Man cometh, will he find faith in the earth? That's Christendom.

But the Church is another thing. The beautiful Church of Christ that we read about in Ephesians 4, where there is one body and one spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, the Father of all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the Son of God, and says then that we must go on until, for the work of the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Now the perfecting of this unity which took place and takes place when anybody is baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, then the perfecting of that until the whole beautiful Church is brought into the presence of Christ, this is the business of the Holy Ghost through the scriptures, through the pastors and teachers and prayer warriors on the earth. But in the meantime, there is a great large body called Christendom, made up of Christians of every stripe and color and kindring, strength and speckle, and this is not included here, and the Holy Spirit never intended it to be here. What then should we do about it briefly? Well, join nothing that questions the truth of the Bible.

Now, let me tell you that. Join nothing that questions the truth of the Bible. I preached down in Newark the other night, as I mentioned, and I said that Jesus Christ took nothing from science and nothing from philosophy and nothing from civilization and nothing from man's wisdom, that he stood alone, unique and supreme above all.

And I went over them one at a time, and I showed them in the end. After the meeting, a fine-looking lady, middle-aged, and a very distinguished-looking husband walked down the aisle and spoke to me. The lady said, Mr. Tozer, we're just fresh out of liberalism.

She said, We have just been delivered from the modernistic church and we've been born again and, oh, we're so glad to hear you. And the distinguished-looking gentleman said, I am a scientist. And he said, After hearing men like you, I know how little we scientists really know after all.

Well, that dear couple, even though he was evidently a brilliant scientist, he looked like one. And after admitting he was one, I know he was one. The question now is, were they to stay in a church that there are several Jehovahs, there are several Jehovah's Witnesses, there are several Jehovah's Witnesses, and there are to laugh, at least with a certain amount of celestial dignity, when I see the astonished look on the face of some people who didn't think we were going to get there, saying, Well, you didn't belong to our denomination at all.

No, I didn't belong to your denomination, but I got there. And their look of astonishment is going to please me. I think I'm going to laugh because I believe that all the people of God are going to make it through without any effort at all, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, and there's the communion.

So therefore, I want to commune with the people of God. I started to say Chicago, of course I mean Toronto, lost a lovely soul here from our midst the other day. He didn't die, he went back to England.

Our friend Jerry Gregson, he was an Episcopalian and he always had his call around the other way. We had one of them here, he wasn't an Episcopalian, but he was sitting here beside me during the Keswick meetings, the spiritual life convention. I sat there alongside of him and felt small, you know, my suit.

And he had on his with a collar around. So the next night I saw him back there, I said, Is this the man that sat beside me on the platform last night with a dog collar on? He said, I'm sure it was a man. He said a man who has to get a clean shirt on occasionally.

So he took it good naturedly. I don't care, let him wear. I have preached in robes.

I never preached with a collar on backwards. I always managed to be sober at the time and put it on right. It means nothing to me.

One fellow said, the reason I wear them, I visit the hospital. If that's worth your trouble, Reverend, go ahead and wear it. I love you and we're one in Christ.

We'll have communion of the Saints. There's always safety near the shepherd, too, you know. It can be suicide for a sheep to stray from the shepherd.

So if you stay close by the shepherd and all the rest of the sheep stay close by the shepherd, you'll not only be near to the shepherd, but you'll be near to each other. Isn't that reasonable? As you crowd in, you get nearer to each other. And then there is the manifestation of the shepherd's presence.

I repeat again that I grieve that we have so little manifestation of the shepherd's presence. We talk about his being here, but we don't sense that he's here. You know what I mean? We don't have the feeling that he's here.

Don't talk down feeling. It's part of our human constitution. When he walks into the presence of his people consciously, they can't help but feel it.

And I think the most wonderful thing that we could have here at Avenue Road would be that we should become so Christ-conscious and so Church-loving that we would clean up our lives and purify our hearts and wash our hands and forgive our enemies and love them, too. Then we would focus our eyes on him and learn to live and pray and preach and give and worship in the conscious presence of the Son of God's love. I think this would be the most beautiful thing in all the wide world.

Dear friends, I don't mind telling you at all, if I knew there was any place on the earth a company of believers that enjoyed this as intensely and wonderfully as they should, I think I would try to find them, and if they would have me, spend the rest of my days with them. But as I've said, I have been among almost all the denominations, from Pentecostals to the Lutherans, and preached for them, and I just don't find it much. Maybe, maybe God would have it, that this Avenue Road Church should be the one to give back to the evangelicals again in this dispensation, this period.

What it means, what Christianity means, what Christian love means, what the real unity of the believer is. Being let go, they went to their own company. And it's a sweet company when the Lord is in the midst of it.

Now, there's where I break off my sermon. I have another page of notes, but it's going to end right there. And I want to pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, we're unworthy to be members of thy body, but we are not going to be tricked by the devil into letting our unworthiness make us morbidly unbelieving, even though we're not worthy to be. We're accepted in thee, and thou hast made us members of thy body, and we accept it. And we leave the matter of our worth with thee.

And if angels or archangels question our right to be there, we look to thee as a sheep looks to his shepherd, and say, answer for me, Lord, answer for me. I admit I'm not worthy, but answer for me, dear Lord. And thou wilt answer for us.

For thou didst come from high heaven to low earth, from the immortal and eternal liberty of the Godhead, to the confines of the Virgin's womb, that we might be redeemed. And thou didst die on the cross of shame and suffering, and rise, that we might be justified and forgiven, and be reunited again with the Father from which we fell in the fall. Lord, all this is true, and we leave it with thee.

Now wilt thou bless and help us to see how wonderful it is to be a member of however small a group that believes in thee. We leave the great, top-heavy Christendom to find its own way. We shall pray, O God, for all the Church, all who call themselves Christians.

We shall be tolerant and kind and charitable and loving and friendly to them all. But we will only go with those that love thy name, that trust the precious work of Christ on the cross, and that are ready to leave all and follow him. We pray, O God, for every Christian in Toronto.

We pray for all the ministers of the truth, and we thank thee there are many who preach the truth. Bless them all, Father, and grant that over these weeks that lie before us, we may see a constant rising tide that shall eventuate and flow, that it shall be like the river that flows out from the throne of God. In all this we ask in Christ's name.

Amen.

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