

Fellowship - Part 2 (Unity)

by Lance Lambert

The principle of unity is essential to the church, and the basis of our fellowship should be Christ alone, not Christ plus or Christ minus.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of maintaining unity among believers. He references Ephesians 4:3, which encourages diligence in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The speaker also highlights the need to recognize the unity of the Spirit, even if it means letting go of denominational divisions. He emphasizes the concept of sharing in the Lord Jesus Christ, which leads to growth and understanding among believers. The sermon concludes with the reminder that this unity in Christ affects every aspect of our lives.

Transcript

If you would like to turn to one or two scriptures this morning, first of all in the seventeenth chapter of John, John 17, and from verse 20. Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their words, that they may all be one, even as thou farther art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me, and the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovest them even as thou lovest me. Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous father, the world knew thee not, but I knew thee, and these, I'm sorry, and these knew that thou didst send me, and I made known unto them thy name, and will make it known that the love wherewith thou lovest me may be in them, and I in them. And then in Ephesians, the Ephesian letter, end chapter four, Ephesians chapter four, from verse one, I therefore the prisoner in the Lord beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, giving diligence to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. And then in the Old Testament, the 133rd Psalm, Psalm 133.

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that came down upon the skirt of his

garment, like the dew of Hermon that cometh down upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life forevermore. Shall we just bow together in prayer? Father, we do thank thee that we are gathered here in thy presence this morning, and we want to recognize and confess that thou hast made our Lord Jesus Christ head over all things to the church.

We thank thee, Father, that thou hast made him our Lord and our head, and we recognize his headship this morning, and we look to thee, Father, that we might know the most wonderful ministry of thy Spirit to our heart. Things that perhaps we already know may come to us with fresh life and power, things that perhaps we have not seen before we may feel, and where there is only a mental or academic appreciation of these things, O Father, grant to us that spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of thyself, that the eyes of our heart, being enlightened, we might know these things. Lord, we do thank thee that there is this anointing upon the head that runs down to the very hem of the garment.

We thank thee for the anointing upon the head, our Lord Jesus, that runs down, as it were, to include every member of the body, and together now we all stand into it, Lord. Whether in hearing or speaking, we all confess, Lord, our bankruptcy when it comes to spiritual things. But, Lord, we praise thee that thou hast made provision for us, and we would come, Lord, through the righteousness of thy Son and on the basis of his finished work, and we would take that provision that we need for this morning.

We stand into the anointing for every single member of the body here this morning, for speaker and for hearer alike, that we might know, Lord, thy presence in our midst, and hear thy voice beyond the human words, and may hear what the Spirit says to us. We do ask it, Father, with thanksgiving in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last night I introduced this matter of fellowship. We spoke about a fellowship, what real fellowship is. Remember that verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 9, God is faithful through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And we, I believe, saw that fellowship is not just a little bit of friendliness, or informality, or spiritual talk, or just meeting together, but it is that we share something together. We have something in common, and, of course, it is our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful through whom ye were called into the sharing of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

I am in the Son, and you're in the Son, and the Son is in you, and the Son is in me. I have something to give of the Son you haven't got to give, and you have something to give of the Son that I haven't got to give. And as we share the Son, we come into a fullness, we come into an understanding, we come, we grow in grace, we grow up into him as the head.

Of course, this basic sharing of the Lord Jesus Christ naturally affects every other thing. Our time, our home, our possession, our energy, all of it is shared. Not that that means that you allow your things to be abused or misused.

There is this idea that once you see that everything you have belongs to the Lord, and it is therefore at the disposal of the church, that somehow or other people can just come in and do what they like, and you must stand by and just watch them sort of spoil your home or spoil your car. I know people, for instance, who feel that they must let their car out to anybody, and there are some people who come along can't drive a toffee. But because they feel that they somehow or other, their car is no longer their own, it's the Lord's, they should allow someone who cannot drive to drive it.

If you know what I mean, the person thinks they can drive, it's got a driver's license, but the way they drive is anybody's business. But you know, whilst we are not the owners of what we possess, we are the stewards, and we are responsible to God for all that belongs to Him. In other words, our homes, though they are His and at the disposal of the family of God, we are stewards of them.

We're not just to let any Tom, Dick and Harry take over. We're not permitted just to allow anyone to take our things and just spoil them or misuse them. We are stewards.

We are responsible to the head. We are responsible to the Lord Jesus. We have to answer for the way that those possessions of ours are used.

And that's a very important point just to make. But we have seen, I think, something about fellowship. Now I want to talk this morning about one of those principles of fellowship.

Of course, in the time that we have, we will only be able to take one or two of these principles, and I want us to let those that I think the Lord would have us really share, which are fundamental and essential to this whole matter of fellowship. And the first principle is the principle of unity. The principle of unity.

I do not think there is any principle related to this matter of fellowship that is more important than this principle of unity. The unity of God's people is not just some luxury to be desired, but we can do without. It is not just some kind of regulation that we can break with impunity if there is no one there to see us break it, or we do not have some excellence, as it were.

This is a principle. If we contravene the principle of the oneness of Christ, then the consequences are always the same and always follow. There is no stopping them.

Once we contravene or contradict the principle of the oneness of Christ, then death results, paralysis results, weakness results, heaviness results, bondage results, corporate inhibition results. There is a kind of tension and strain about everything. But once we obey, we recognize and obey the principle of the oneness of Christ, then immediately we discover that there is development, there is increase, there is expression of Christ, there is the equipping of the same, there is the raising up in our midst of ministries, there is the qualifying of leadership.

All these things result from the principle of the oneness of Christ being recognized and obeyed. Therefore, dear child of God, there is no principle more important than this. I go round to many, many companies all over the place, and I see in many companies those who recognize a certain amount of church truth.

They see something of the nature of the church. They see something of the ministries of the church. They see something, as it were, of the purpose of God.

Yet, their great cry is, why is there no leadership? Why is there no real leadership? Why are there no real ministries amongst us? Why are there not being raised up in our midst men who had the ministry of God's Word? Prophets, teachers, evangelists. Always it goes back to this point that somewhere or other some principle, some essential and fundamental principle of fellowship is being contradicted. Here is one of them.

What is the basis of our fellowship together? It's a good question. What is the basis of our fellowship together? Now, listen carefully to this, because even though we say the basis of our fellowship is Christ, we can deceive ourselves, and although we say it is Christ, in practice it may be many other things. What

is the basis upon which alone we can know true fellowship? It is not truth, however important.

It is not teachings, however correct. It is not experiences, however necessary. It is not emphases of truth, nor technique, nor our denomination, nor the membership role.

All of those are many things that we make the basis of our fellowship. Some groups, for instance, will make baptism in water the rule of membership. You're allowed to attend, but until you've been baptized by immersion, you are not in the church.

You are not a member of the church. Others make some other point. Some, for instance, will make some experience of the Holy Spirit the sort of key to being really in.

Now, there are many groups who will say to you, ah, no, we don't expect that. Nevertheless, there are first and second class citizens. There are those who've seen, and those who have not seen.

And those who've seen are in, and those who've not seen are out. And those who've not seen are made to feel very out by those who are in and who have seen. In other words, all the line all along is, you know, well, you've got to see.

You've got to see. You've got to see. You've got to see.

We don't leave it to the Holy Spirit somehow or other to draw people into our fellowship, because we all love Christ, and because we include every single one who is in Christ. Oh, no, no, no. We are all the time labouring the point that there's something this person has not experienced, something this person has not seen.

And therefore, we make of our fellowship a first and second class citizenship. There are those who are first class citizens. They're the ones who've seen or experienced and are in the elite, in the circle.

And there are those who have not seen, and they're outside. Now, don't get me wrong on this matter. Of course, there are things we have to see.

In a living church, in the church as God would have it, which would include every believer of all shapes, sizes, sorts and colours, the fact of the matter is there will always be those who haven't seen. And there will always be those who have seen and who are progressively seeing more of the Lord. But every single thing depends upon the attitude of those who have seen.

It is not those who have not seen that are the problem. It is the people who've seen who are the problem. It is not those who have not had experiences that are the problem.

It is those who've had the experiences that are the problem. You know, sometimes the Lord may take years with us to bring us to a place where we see something. But the moment we see it, we expect others immediately, in an instant, to come in.

We will give them tracts and pamphlets and books and send them postal courses of instruction. And I don't know what else we'll do to get them in as quickly as possible. And the impression we give is that we are in and they are out.

Now, we love them. Why do we give them the pamphlets? Why do we give them the tracts? It's not just because, as in some cases, we are just looking upon them as soaps to be counted. It is that in many

cases we have a real love and concern for the people of God.

But our whole conception of fellowship is wrong. Babies are babies. You don't put babies in a high school.

You care for babies until they grow to such an age that they can go through the various stages of education and enter into high school and finally university. Whatever is wrong with our fellowship? That all the time we expect as soon as a person is born again that they've got to sort of grow in some kind of greenhouse so swiftly that they've seen all that we have seen in a matter of moments. Such understanding is nearly always artificial and false.

I believe that when in any company of God's people there are a nucleus of those who've really seen and really experienced things of the Lord and gone deeper and are going deeper with Him and have laid down their lives for the whole, then it is true that those who are saved will rapidly grow. They will not need to go through the years that we went through. I remember I went through four years of darkness before I came into an experience of the Holy Spirit and of the cross.

And I promised the Lord when I came there that I would give every single person who ever found the Lord through me, by His grace, a full gospel, the whole counsel of God and not just the little bit that I had to live on. But nevertheless, we must understand that spiritual things are organic. They cannot be organized.

Dear child of God, don't you see that we who believe so much in the organic nature of everything that is spiritual are ourselves guilty of organizing things. We're always organizing everything so that those who smoke will not smoke, and those who drink will not drink, and those who are worldly will not be worldly, and those who haven't had an experience of holiness will immediately have an experience of holiness, and those who have not had a baptism in the Spirit will have a baptism in the Spirit. We're organizing everything all the time.

We don't leave it to the organic. What is the basis of our fellowship? Now there must be a minimum truth. That is obvious.

And we must be very careful that we do not go too far in this matter as if we're by saying truth is not the basis of our fellowship, but Christ. We give the impression that it is some ethereal, abstract, vague Christ. Christ is the truth.

And there is a sense in which there is minimal truth concerning a person of God, concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning his atoning death and his bodily resurrection. These things are essential truth. No one can really be in the fellowship who doesn't at least recognize it and may not understand it all.

But that's minimum truth. But beyond that there are a thousand and one other truths. I know companies where people have been put out because they believe that we're going to go through the tribulation.

My goodness me! Fancy! You put people out of fellowship because they believe you're going to go through the tribulation. I wish I could be as dogmatic as that. So we're all going to be raptured before the tribulation, are we? And there are other groups that look down their noses at anyone who believes we're going to be raptured before the tribulation.

And then there are those blessed and most spiritual of all people who believe that we shall be taken during the tribulation. And that only those who are ready for the Lord shall be taken. And shall we divide on such things? I know an assembly in a place in Britain called Totterdown.

And they put out a dear brother that I know very well simply because he believed that only the overcomer would be raptured. He didn't divide the same. He didn't even major on it.

He just happened to believe it. So they put him out. Of course they lived up to their name.

They Totterdown. You can't put out someone whom God has received on some basis like that. Now the whole danger of the charismatic, and I speak from some experience of the charismatic, the whole danger of the charismatic is that we make the charismatic the basis for perversion.

Thank God for everyone who's been renewed by the Spirit of God. People tell me that the charismatic is all up the wall and full of extremes and excesses. I tell you that I know literally thousands of people who were dead dry bones before the Spirit of God came upon them.

Am I to deny that the Spirit of God has come upon them? Suddenly I find them full of spiritual life, full of the Lord, full of Christ. Suddenly those who were static are moving on with God. I cannot deny that God has done something.

And from my heart I thank God for all that he has done through the charismatic. But to make the charismatic the basis of fellowship, or even to make a first and second class citizenship is utterly wrong. We of course, I don't think it hardly needs to be said here, there are those of course who meet on the ground of denominationalism.

There are those who meet on the ground of Christ plus Methodism. And others who meet on the ground of Christ plus Baptism. And others who meet on the ground of Christ plus Episcopalianism.

And others who will meet on the ground of Christ plus Pentecostalism. But this is not the basis of our fellowship. What is the basis of our fellowship? It is Christ alone.

Not Christ plus, nor Christ minus. Not less than Christ, nor more than Christ. But the foundation of our fellowship, the basis of our fellowship is Christ.

We must receive all on this basis. We cannot reject one whom Christ has received. For it says in Romans chapter 15 and verse 7, Well, for receiving one another, even as Christ also received you to the glory of God.

How did Christ receive me? Did he receive me as an elite going on saint? No. Did he receive me as someone who would be a servant of the Lord? No. Did he receive me as someone who would please him? No.

Did he receive me as someone who was ready to go to the waters of baptism? No. Did he receive me as someone who was prepared to know an experience of the cross? No. How did he receive me? He received me as a hopeless sinner whom he saved by his grace through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was the basis upon which he received me. How shall I receive you? Why, if I was to receive you on the minimum basis that you are a sinner saved by grace, all my problems would be over. But we don't receive one another as sinners saved by grace.

We receive one another as great saints. Oh, we see those lovely shining faces and we say, oh, it's lovely being with so and so. So and so is such a saint until we get to know them.

And then suddenly we find that the cosmetics disappear. The spiritual cosmetics go. The spiritual hairdos go.

We see them as it were in their bedroom, spiritually. We see them with their hair down or their hair in curlers or whatever it is, their teeth out. And then suddenly we are shocked to the matter.

Oh, we think, dear, dear, dear, dear, dear, I never thought it of so and so. So and so I thought was so spiritual. I can't have fellowship anymore with so and so.

It's no good. It's no good. My fellowship with so and so is ruined.

You poor soul. Is that the basis of your fellowship? Is that the basis of your fellowship? So you reject someone whom Christ has received. You see, we have this weird idea that God is always getting surprises about us.

It is a strange thing that we all have this idea that God took us on and sort of was quite pleased with us after he saved us. And then he begins to find things out about us. You know, we lose our temper and then we feel, oh, he's so disillusioned.

The Lord is so disillusioned. And then the devil comes and says, now don't you pray again. It's no good you praying because God is so upset.

Or you get irritated or some unclean thought comes into your head. And the moment the devil comes to you and says, now you can't pray. You can't pray.

God is so disillusioned with you. Disappointed. That's the word for it.

He's disappointed with you. But do you know that when God saved you, he had your whole life like an open book. He saw every single thing that you would ever do as it were already an open book.

I'm a good Calvinist in this matter. God saw every single thing about you when he saved you. There's not a thing about you that will surprise him.

And do you know that he still saved you? He still saved you with all that rebellion in the future, with all that resistance that he saw, with all that ugliness, with all that sort of refusal to allow him to deal with you. Still he saved you with your whole book like an open, your life like an open book before him. God is not surprised.

You are the one who's surprised. And do you know what it is that stops us from coming back to God? It's our pride. You see, often we get so surprised about ourselves, so shocked, that because we're shocked about ourselves, we think God is.

Now God does not condone our sins. But he's not surprised. God knows our capacity for evil far, far more fully than we.

He knows what we're capable of if we're subjected to the right temptations. That's why he taught us to pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Now my point is this.

God is quite unshockable when it comes to you. He knows everything about you and a good deal more than you know about yourself and what you're capable of. And still he received you as a sinner, whom he

saved.

Now you and I are to receive one another as Christ also received us. He received me as a sinner, I must receive you as a sinner. Well now we're going to get down to brass tacks now.

That means I've got to receive you with your spiritual teeth out. I've got to receive you for what you are. The fact is this.

If God has received you through Christ, I must receive you. Can I reject someone whom Christ has received? People tell me again and again in my fellowship with Catholics that I should have nothing to do with them, that I am being deluded and deceived and I don't know what else. But can I reject someone who happens to be a Roman Catholic whom God has received? Never.

Am I to receive some dead nominal Lutheran as a brother whom God has not received through Jesus Christ, but to reject a Roman Catholic whom God has received through Jesus Christ? I cannot do it. If God has received a person, I must receive that person. If God has received that one on the basis of his finished work, I receive that one on the basis of his finished work.

Fellowship, this principle of unity, you see, it's a principle. You whittle down your fellowship to one less than the Father has received and you will contradict the principle of the oneness of Christ. Put them out for any other reason than for apostasy or discipline and you have put out Christ Now I'd like to go on and say something more about this whole matter of unity.

I want you to notice that there are two kinds of unity that we have in Ephesians 4. In verse 3 we have the unity of the Spirit. And will you notice how we are introduced to it? Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And then will you notice verse 13.

Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a full grown man. Now do you notice there are two kinds of unity here? First we have the unity of the Spirit and we are told that the unity of the Spirit we are to keep or to maintain. And then we have the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God which we are to attain to.

Now we in Christian circles have inverted the order. We have made the unity of the faith something that is the basis for our fellowship and the unity of the Spirit something we are coming to. God says the unity of the Spirit is something which is yours and you entered it by new birth.

When you were born of God you were born into the unity of the Spirit. You were born into the oneness of Christ. Did you notice those wonderful words of our Lord Jesus Christ? That they may all be one even as thou father art in me and I in thee that they may be in us.

Do you realize that this unity which is ours is the same inexplicable unity that exists between the Father and the Son and which has never at any time been adequately reduced to human words. As father I am in thee and thou art in me that they may be in us. Now you begin to understand something of this.

Our dear brother Stephen Cohn spoke about the counsel of God. Here you have really got it. The desire of God to bring us into himself, to as it were bring us into a union with himself, to make us partakers of his own nature and in so doing make us as it were one body.

That they may be in us. Now you understand the principle of unity. If we contradict the principle of unity we do damage to the very nature of God.

In some way it is not just the nature of the church but the very nature of the Trinity. And in some way we sin against it. When we are part of a faction or a division, if I was to go and get drunk as I have said to you I believe on other occasions, you would all be shocked.

You would say straight away what a dreadful thing. They asked that brother to come and speak to us and he got drunk. Fancy! What kind of people are they that organise this time? That they asked a brother to come to us who had such a feeling for drink.

And if I got drunk, and I am not in any way lessening the sin, the fact of the matter is that I sinned against my own body. But it is an extraordinary thing that we can all be part of divisions or factions or out of sorts with one another and no one sees it as a sin against the body of Christ. If I commit immorality I have sinned but I have sinned against my own body.

I am against my own being. But when I am part of a faction or a division or I am in a state of collision with another saint, I am sinning against the body of our Lord Jesus. Those very solemn words were said about those who do not deserve the body of our Lord.

Not meaning the bread and the wine but the spiritual entity that is as it were contained and expressed in the bread and the wine. It is for this cause some are weak and some are sick and some have died. That is what this principle of unity means.

It is cause and effect. There are sicknesses amongst the people of God that are due wholly to the fact that people are in a state of division. There is weakness amongst the people of God wholly due to the fact that we are in a state of division and there are even deaths.

Now don't argue with me about this. It is in the Word. 1 Corinthians 11 verses 27, 28, 29.

You begin to realise the serious nature of this whole matter of oneness. When we begin to see that the unity that exists between us and our Lord and between us is the same essential unity as between the Father and the Son. It is something that God has brought us into.

One life. One life. Eternal life.

The life of God. It is one life. Now having said that, may I say something more on this matter so that we can get ourselves to trust even clearer here.

You see we have a unity of the Spirit and we are told in Ephesians 4 verse 3, give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is ours. We have been born into it.

Thank God. Are you a child of God? You have been born into this oneness. You don't have to fight toward it.

You don't have to somehow attain to it. You don't have to make it your goal. It is yours.

You may be the youngest Christian in this place but you have been born into this oneness. By the grace of God you have been introduced to the oneness of Christ. You are experiencing it even if you don't know it.

And that is why you will find that every young believer who is first saved before the older believers get their clammy hands on them. Every young believer who is first saved, the first thing they feel is a wonderful love toward all the people of God. I have never known a single person saved who thought he was a Baptist or a Methodist or an Episcopalian or any of the other multitudinous denominations you have on this side of the Atlantic.

I have only found that when a person is saved they are full of love to the people of God. It is when the rest of the older believers start to get their sticky hands on them and sort of say now you are a Baptist. You are a Methodist.

You must understand. You have been saved into the correct people. The proper people.

The only people. But there is a unity of the faith to which we are to come to. We are to arrive at.

It is till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. You see, this unity that is ours is a fact. But we have to be perfected into one.

Did you notice in John 17 our Lord first says in verse 21 that they may all be one even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee that they may also be in us. And then in verse 23 he says I in them and thou in me that they may be perfected into one. In other words, first we have something which is a fait accompli.

Something done. Something which is already ours. It is a fact.

But the second thing is this. That when we are in it we have got to be perfected into it. We are to grow up into the head.

We are to be knit together. We are to be fitly framed together. We have got to find each other in the Lord.

We have got to work at it. This unity of the Spirit is not something you can just say oh yes, yes of course we are all one. We are one.

Christ is our one. Oh goodbye. And you are off.

You live your own sweet little life. Contained within your own family circle. You come to meetings.

You see the saints. You sing a few hymns. Say a few prayers.

Listen to a word or two. Participate if you have a freer type of meeting. And off you go.

That is all there is. And somehow or other you feel that somewhere in the great unseen this fitly framing together is taking place. Some kind of magic way that no one ever sees.

We are all being knit together and fitly framed together. The Bible says we are to grow together. We are to be fitly framed together.

We are to be builded together as a home of God in the Spirit. In other words we have to give diligence to keep this unity of the Spirit. It is not enough that we should see the oneness of Christ.

The next thing we have to do is to commit ourselves to the oneness of Christ. And then be prepared for all the many difficulties, limitations, problems that will come in the being perfected into one. Oh if only it was one of those wonderful instant things that you have over here.

Instant cream and instant coffee and instant lemon tea and instant I don't know what else. Would be lovely if we could have this kind of instant perfection into oneness. But it is here that we have all our problems.

It is much easier to be one with the saints in Melbourne Australia than one with the saints in Ashland Virginia. I mean I always hear people saying oh it is so wonderful to be in the body of Christ. And what they mean by the body of Christ is the saints in Africa, Asia, Australasia South America and the other side of the United States.

But God says the whole thing comes down to where you live. It is no good saying I believe in the oneness of Christ if we don't recognize that oneness where we live. And somehow or other we are to be built together in that area in which we live.

Because the whole thing finally comes down to where we live. Whatever we may feel about locality the fact of the matter is that in the end all spiritual things come down to your body. And your body is located on this earth.

And it comes down to your home. And your home is located in some place on the earth. And it comes down to the company of believers where you live in some locality on this earth.

It turns to reason. I can talk till I am blue in the face about going on with the Lord and the whole thing can be some kind of pipe dream. It is all up there in the clouds.

We have all met people who talk and talk and talk and talk and who have nothing in their lives of the practice. They live in some kind of fool's paradise. Some kind of day dreaming all the time.

God brings the whole thing down to the matter of where we live. And the believers that are in the same area in which we live. And how we are getting on with them.

And in what way we are being built together. Would you say well that's not so easy. Because in the area in which I live, well there are Episcopalians and there are Baptists and there are Methodists and there are this and there are that and the other.

And really they won't come together. But there may be some who at least see something of the oneness of Christ. And with whom you can move together and fellowship together and be built together.

We don't shut out other people. We include them. The church is not exclusive.

It is inclusive. And that has been one of the great mistakes of church history. That every time people have seen something they have become exclusive instead of inclusive.

Instead of taking in the whole family of God and saying well if they want to go their way we can't stop them. But we will put no barriers up. They belong to us.

We belong to them. And we will love them. And we will serve them.

And if necessary we will lay down our lives for them. Some people's attitude is this. That if a person is a believer but a Baptist.

Well I am not going to lay down my life for him. That would be a waste. If someone is a believer who has really seen something I will lay down my life for him.

But that is not the cross. The cross is that the Lord Jesus laid down his life for us all. And the vast majority of those of us who have been saved are a load of trouble to him.

We do not progress as we ought to progress. We do not grow as we ought to grow. But he laid down his life for us all.

May the Lord help us to see this basis of our fellowship and see it in practical terms and see that there has got to be some perfecting into that one then. There has got to be some building. There has got to be some growing up into the head from whom the whole body quickly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplier increases.

To build up itself the love of God. That leads me to another point I would like to make. And that is the great variety that there is in this unity.

Now suffer me for a few moments on this matter. It is an extraordinary thing in the history of God's work and of the church how as soon as men and real men of God begin to see something of the nature of God's purpose they in the end reduce the whole thing to a uniformity. They seem to equate unity with uniformity.

Now many of these would be the first to deny it and say no no no we believe that unity the diversity in unity. But when it comes to it we all have to do what they say. We all have to think as they think.

We all have to act as they act. We all have to almost clothe ourselves as they are clothed. We are not permitted to be original people.

We all have to be little uniform copies of some master pattern. You see it again and again and again. Take the Quakers.

Whatever a movement of the Spirit of God like the Quakers but before very long it was all these and vows and buckles on hats and buckles on shoes. Now if there are any Quakers forgive me but you know what I mean. And then there were the Mennonites.

No buttons. Shirt and clothes. Thank God for the Mennonites.

What a movement of God it was. But it was reduced to a uniformity. I can tell you Pentecostals by the way they pray.

Most of them are like planes taking off on the runway. You know they sort of rev up the old propeller type on the run. I can even tell you the kind of Pentecostals at home by the way they pray.

It is amazing this uniformity we get. Somehow we have to reduce everything to a system, everything to a structure, everything to a kind of uniformity. But in this unity of Christ there is tremendous variety and tremendous diversity and tremendous originality.

Never be afraid of being yourself. God can never be himself till you are yourself. And God can never be himself in a company of people till every member of the body of Christ is himself or herself.

When we all ain't one another and try to be one another we do terrible damage to the whole work of the Spirit of God in really building up the body of Christ. Whole movements of the Spirit of God such as the Exclusive Brethren have gone right up the rails on this issue. They have reduced everything to such a uniformity that they have lost the headship of Jesus Christ and found the headship of men.

We must be built together. And in being built together we have to sacrifice our individuality. Or individualism perhaps would be more correct to say.

We must know a certain limitation. How can one stone be built together next to another stone and then have another stone on top and another stone already underneath without feeling some claustrophobic sense. There is a limitation in fellowship.

There is a discipline in fellowship. There is something that gets at the very root of the fall in this whole matter of fellowship which is that we want to be our untouched selves. But having said that our being built together and all the discipline and limitation of fellowship must never be at the expense of variety and originality.

Isn't it interesting that at the beginning of all these movements of the Spirit of God there has been such an expression sometimes for instance in poetry, in hymnology, in songs in all kinds of things. Because everyone under the government of the Spirit bound together expressed the Lord in an original way. But as time goes on you find less and less and less and less.

And when you do get anything written it's hideous. Because it's just a party line. Now I must say a word of warning here about eccentricity.

God in his great mercy has saved a number of eccentrics. Every company of the Lord's people has within it eccentrics. Nor should we throw them out because they are eccentric.

Some eccentrics, and I could keep you here for an hour or two telling you stories about eccentrics I know, have been really used of the Lord in their strange eccentric way. But nevertheless there is, we must never think that originality is eccentricity. There is within all of us some desire to be exhibitionists.

Even those who are introspective. It's only pride that so often makes them hang back in the background. Really they're just as much exhibitionists as the rest of us.

But we're a little afraid of it. Because we're afraid we might make a mistake in our exhibition and sort of blow the gas. We have to be careful of eccentrics and at the same time receive them.

This oneness of Christ does not mean that we put up with anything. There is a discipline in the body of Christ. And there are times when the brethren have to speak to someone whose eccentricity is damaging the testimony of the Lord.

And we've seen eccentrics, and I should tell you a number in our own company, who have really been modified and adjusted. They're still eccentric because God saved an eccentric. But they're modified and kept in check without destroying their originality.

Every one of us is different. Every one of us has something to give. We have different backgrounds, we have different temperaments, we have different emphases.

You see if we had John Newton with us, could he do anything else that accentuates the grace of God? His very background and his temperament must mean that his emphasis is the grace of God. And whenever we meet together in some way or another, you will find that his contribution is somehow always related to the grace of God. And you may have other people who in the most wonderful way have something else to give.

Maybe it's the love of God. They are always overwhelmed by the love of God. And they have this to give because their very background, their very temperament, everything somehow has led them to an appreciation of the love of God.

We all appreciate the love of God. But they have something to give in this matter. Do you understand? God forbid that we should all be the same.

In our company we have those who believe in predestination. They're normally called Calvinists. I'm one of them.

And we have others who are Arminians. That is those who believe in the free world. We've never fought.

I am free just to simply say that I believe firmly in the sovereignty of God in all things. And others go on talking about the responsibility of man and the free world. We need each other.

I don't see how people can be anything else but a Calvinist when some things happen to them. I have a friend, long since now gone to the Lord, he and his wife, he got drunk. He was a captain in the merchant navy.

And he got drunk. He didn't want that. But in his drunken stupor, God appeared to him.

And when he came out with a hangover, he was saved. That man became a Calvinist. What else? Could he be anything else? It was stupid to say to him, ah, but you are in error.

You are in error. The man had been converted to the drunken stupor. But even more amazing, his dear wife, who overlived him by quite a few years, and had only recently gone to the Lord, she was so puzzled by this amazing change in his behaviour that she said to me, I was sweeping up dust in the hall, and I suddenly leant on top of the broom, and suddenly I was converted.

I just leant and thinking, whatever has happened to Charles? And she got saved. Of course, they became outstanding Calvinists. Someone else who got saved by going forward in a meeting.

And it's just been just as real a conversion. And naturally see, for me, for man to respond, and for man's responsibility, they see it. But don't you see that in this oneness of Christ has place for both of us? We are all too small to contain the infinity of God.

We can't do it. However much we think people say, I always hate that little hymn, come and rejoice with me, because the last verse says, and now I know it all. Which I think adequately sums up some Christians.

They give the impression that now I know it all. But you know, however much we know, we only know in part. And what I see has to be tempered by what you see.

And what I give has to be as it were, tempered by what you give. I used to wonder when I was first saved, why there was a Matthew, a Mark and a Luke and a John. I was always wondering because I understood, although when I was saved I had never read my Bible.

And I knew nothing about it. But when I first began, I got hold of a whole Bible and began to read it. I was very, very amazed by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

And especially when I heard from some Christians that there were contradictions. And they said, how extraordinary. They tell me it's the Word of God and it's authoritative and inspired and yet there are contradictions.

So I went to a godly old man in the church and I asked him all about it. And he said, well you see, Matthew reveals Christ as King, Mark reveals Christ as servant, Luke reveals Christ as man and John reveals Christ as God. And then I said to him, well I can't understand that.

Being a very irreverent youngster, I said, I was only thirteen, I said to him, well I don't understand that because if I'd been God, I would have taken John. You say he's the most spiritual. Why couldn't John have written the whole lot and revealed Christ as King, Christ as servant, Christ as man and Christ as God and you wouldn't have your contradictions.

Well of course he gave me up. He told me I was a hopeless case. I still bleed in the authority and inspiration of the Bible.

It was only many years later that I came to see that you see, that when God wanted to reveal Christ as King, he took Matthew, who was an income tax inspector and knew a lot about kings and their government and institutions like that. And from his background, his very, very conservative Hebrew background, he was of the Levitical tribe. He was able to, as it were, access Christ as King.

And he took Mark, which was of course as we often say the voice of Peter and the hand of Mark. The fact of the matter was that it was Peter the fisherman. And it was through Peter that we see Christ as a servant of the Lord.

And then he takes Luke, drops Luke and reveals Christ as man, through a man who understands the anatomy and who understands something in the makeup of man. And finally he takes John and reveals Christ as God. Now when you bring Matthew and Mark and Luke and John together you have fullness.

When you divide them you've fragmented the unity. You know our churches are all Matthew's over here, Mark's over there, Luke's over here and John's over there. And we've fragmented the unity of Christ.

When we bring them together we have fullness. Where all of us are Matthew's or Mark's or Luke's or John's we have it everywhere. You can still tell the difference between the Apostle Paul and James in the very style of writing.

You can tell the difference between the Apostle John and the Apostle Peter in the style of inspiration. How come it's not uniform? How come somehow all these styles have not been overcome by the Spirit of God? Because the Spirit of God does not bypass human personality. God expresses himself through human personality.

That's why pagan inspiration is always the bypassing of the mind. That's spiritistic. Mediums go out and they say a thing.

And they don't even know what they're saying. But inspiration, true inspiration the exercise of spiritual gift is always under the control of the prophet. The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet.

They may not always understand exactly the meaning of what they say, but they do know what the words they're using. For it says so, they inquire as to what the Spirit of Christ in them did mean when he signified

these things. They weren't just blotto, just sort of out, unconscious.

They're now being sort of manipulated by the Spirit of God. But that's the idea some people have got. No, not at all.

When the Spirit of God gets into us, he takes us all. I believe there are things that Paul would never have written if he'd realized that it was scripture. Do you think the apostle Paul would have put down things like, oh, you're making me boast all you lot.

Or another place where he said, I was so sorry about that first letter I wrote to you, I wept buckets of tears over it, until I got your second letter and then I realized that all was okay. If he'd realized that thousands and thousands of Christians all down through the generations were going to study those words, he would have, oh, I must cut that out, I must cut that out. But you see, when the Spirit of God came through the apostle Paul, we find part of the apostle Paul comes over as well.

We find a man is there. He's disciplined, he's broken, he's joined to the Lord, but it's still Paul, it's still Peter, it's still James, it's still John. That's what we need.

If we are to really know this oneness of Christ, and interdependence upon one another in a right way, and yet originality, and variety, and diversity in this oneness. Well, now I will close. But may I say four things, and I will only just mention them.

In the maintenance of this unity, which is so essential, here is the first, recognition. Romans 12, verses 3-6. If you want to go away and look those up.

We shall never be able to maintain the unity of the Spirit until we first recognize the unity of the Spirit. In other words, this may sometimes cost us everything to recognize the unity of the Spirit. I cannot touch things that are division.

I love all the people of God, but I cannot become a Baptist. I cannot be a Methodist. I cannot be an Episcopalian.

I cannot touch those things which divide the body of Christ, but the people of God within them, I belong to. I will serve them to my last day. I belong to them, and they belong to me.

We are the Israel of God. Recognition. We are one.

Not we ought to be one. We are one. I start on that basis.

I don't look at my sister and say, shall I have her as my sister, or not. I start on the basis she is my sister. We have problems at times, especially in the past.

But she is my sister. She is my flesh and blood. I belong to her, she belongs to me.

We are in the same family. So we must recognize every true child of God as a member of the family. They may not exactly be to our liking, but they are our brothers and our sisters, and we have to love them and care for them.

That's the first thing. The second thing is we must receive one another. That is Romans 15, verse 7. And do compare that with Romans 14, verse 1. Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye yet not for the

investigation of his conscience.

Oh my, don't we go in for that sometimes. As soon as we find a new believer we want to find out, have they been baptized, have they had an experience of the Holy Spirit, do they know what holiness is? Have they separated from the world? We investigate their conscience, okay, and if we feel that they haven't got too much of a conscience we'll give them one. We'll make up that any deficiency of conscience by making sure that they are quite clear as to what is right and what is wrong in these things.

We can't leave them to the Spirit of God. And we are to receive one another as also Christ received us. And if you want another verse there, Philippians 3, 15 and 16, only whereunto you have attained by that same rule, let us walk.

In other words, don't you come down for what God has done with you. If God has brought you to a certain point, you stay to it because God has dealt with you. But don't expect everybody else to immediately be brought to that same level.

God may have dealt with you for a particular reason. You obey the Lord and go on with Him and love the rest. Thirdly, maintenance, Ephesians 4, verse 3. This means we have to work on this matter.

Give diligence to maintain, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In other words, you can't just sort of leave it as a vague, abstract matter. You've got to give diligence to keep it.

Now that may cost you an awful lot of time. There are times when you feel someone's got something against you and you may have to go to them and say, what is it? There are other times when you've got something against someone else and after you've sought the Lord, you've got to go and get that settled. But keep the unity of the Spirit.

Remember what our Lord said, if ye forgive one another, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you. Remember, He taught us to pray in the pattern prayer, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.

Now that is a tremendous thing to pray, for we are praying that God will only forgive us in the measure in which we forgive others. And our Lord took this one thing out of the whole pattern prayer and said, this is the most important thing of all. And He put it first in the positive, then in the negative.

He said if you forgive men their trespasses, your Father will forgive you. If you forgive not neither will your Father forgive you. Now isn't that tremendous? That brings you immediately to the tremendous importance of this matter of the oneness of Christ.

And lastly open that. 1 John 1 7 says if we walk in the light as God is in the light we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. Do you know you cannot maintain fellowship when you are doing things in the dark.

Sometimes people have got all kinds of things and they won't bring them out into the open, they won't bring them out for fellowship, they won't bring them out into the light, they hide them. They are so afraid of what their brothers and sisters will do if they bring it out into the open. Sometimes it's not something dark or wrong, sometimes it's just a question of career, job, or where you are going to go.

And we are so afraid to bring it out into the open and share it. Because we feel that somehow or other maybe they will dictate to us or do this or this or this. Never.

We must walk in the light as God is in the light. And then we have fellowship one with another. So we pray.

Dear Lord thou knowest just how fundamental and essential this principle of unity is in the matter of fellowship. Lord wilt thou take all this that has been said this morning and get it into our hearts. Where there is already some understanding, O give greater understanding.

And where there has been no understanding of this matter, Lord let thy light shine in and give we pray an understanding of this whole matter. We want to be a people who give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We want to know Lord that increasing with the increase of God.

We want to know the body building up itself in love. O Lord help us. And if Lord there are things that are wrong amongst us, give us grace and help us Lord to put those things right.

And we ask it together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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