

Fellowship - Part 3 (Continuity)

by Lance Lambert

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the principle of continuity in the context of the church, and how it can help us avoid mistakes and tragedies by learning from the past and building on the foundation of Christ.

Scripture: Zechariah 4:1

Topics: "Fellowship", "Continuity in Christ"

Description

Lance Lambert emphasizes the principle of continuity in fellowship, urging believers to recognize their organic connection to the historical church and the movements of the Spirit throughout the ages. He highlights that true fellowship is not superficial but a deep sharing in Christ, which binds all believers together across time and space. Lambert warns against the dangers of viewing contemporary movements as entirely new and separate from the past, stressing that God's work is a continuous building process culminating in Christ. He encourages the church to learn from its history, acknowledging the sacrifices of past saints while moving forward in unity and purpose. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of our collective identity in Christ and the importance of maintaining the values recovered through history.

Transcript

...readings this evening, if you would like to take your Bibles, and we will start in the Old Testament, in the prophecy of Zachariah, and chapter four. Zachariah, chapter four, from verse one. And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.

And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have seen and behold a lampstand all of gold, with its bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon. There are seven pipes to each of the lamps, which are upon the top thereon, and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereon. And I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my Lord.

Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto the rubbable, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? For for the rubbable thou shalt become a plain, and he shall bring forth the topstone with shoutings of grace unto it. Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of the rubbable have laid the foundation of this house.

His hands shall also finish it, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? For these seven shall rejoice and shall see the plummet in the hand of the rubble. These are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth.

And then in the gospel according to Matthew, Matthew's gospel, chapter sixteen and verse eighteen, Matthew, chapter sixteen, verse eighteen, And I also say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gate of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. And then in the revelation and chapter ten, Revelation, chapter ten, from verse one, And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud, and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was of the sun and his feet as pillars of fire.

And he had in his hand a little book open, and he set his right foot upon the sea and his left upon the earth. And he cried with a great voice as a lion roared. And when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices.

And when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write, and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Feel up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. And the angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swear by him that liveth forever and ever, who created the heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that there shall be delay no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

Shall we bow together in prayer? I feel I have a burden this evening, a particular one, to do with fellowship, but which will need all the Lord's grace, I think, to discharge, and will need all the Lord's grace for you to really hear what he says. So shall we really, all of us, unite together in really taking hold of the Lord and standing into that anointing which is ours in the Lord Jesus Christ, made available to us by the Spirit of God for this time. Let's really bow together.

O Father, we come to thee as thy children, whom thou hast redeemed through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank thee, as we have already thanked thee, for all that thou art to us. And Lord, now as we come, we pray, Lord, that as we turn to thy Word, thou wilt make it living and active. Thou wilt, Lord, make it to be something that is, as it were, a ministry of life from thy throne to all of us.

O Lord, thou knowest this burden I have. I believe it is from thee, Lord. Help me to discharge it.

Open a door of utterance to speak this mystery of Christ. And Lord, give us ears to hear by thy Spirit what thou art saying. Quieten the children, Lord, and every other noise or anything else that would, Lord, be used by the enemy to somehow make it difficult for thee to get through to us.

Lord, we hold this time before thee. We thank thee there is an anointing for it. We thank thee thou hast made a provision of grace for it.

Lord, we would exploit that grace. We would take hold of it, Lord. For speaker and hearer alike, we commit ourselves to thee in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Now, there is one other little phrase in Deuteronomy chapter 8. And it is found in verse 2. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee to prove thee to know what was in thy heart, whether thou would keep his commandments or not. And I would just like to underline that little word, thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee.

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee. We have been talking about fellowship, and we have been talking about the principles of fellowship. We have been talking together about the meaning of true fellowship, something of its true meaning.

We have discovered that fellowship is not just something that is surface or superficial, but is, in its deepest and most substantial sense, the sharing of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. That does not mean, of course, that the Lord Jesus has lost his unique position.

He is still God the Son. But we, joined to him, have become the new man. And in this marvellous sense, we have been brought into a union with God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a union with one another.

We have come into an eternal relationship with God and an eternal relationship with one another in him. We spoke the other morning or evening, I cannot remember, on the principle of unity. And really what I want to say this evening is an expansion and an extension of that principle of unity.

Not a regulation, but a principle. That it is something which is cause and effect. If we obey that principle of unity, then there are certain consequences, certain results.

We, of course, spoke about the oneness of all God's people here on earth. Our oneness with believers where we live, and so on. What I want to speak about this evening is perhaps not so easy to put in a word or two, but it is what I call the principle of continuity.

The principle of continuity. And it is very rarely recognised or understood by the people of God. And it seems to me that it is the ignorance of this principle which is the undoing of many, many real and genuine movements of the Spirit of God.

God starts to do something very real amongst His people. But because those dear believers, we believers, do not understand that we are essentially and organically bound up with all that has gone before, we make some terrible mistakes. There are some tragedies.

Because the Lord says, Remember not the former things in one connection, I will do a new thing. And because all of us love to be in something that is new, we forget that there are times when God says to us, Thou shalt remember all the way that the Lord thy God hath led thee. Now, of course, we do not recite the Creed together.

But there is a phrase in the Creed, the earliest of all the creeds that Christians recite, and it is this, I believe in the communion of saints. I believe in the communion of saints. What does that mean? It means simply this, we are not only one with all who are in Christ on this earth now, but we are one in Christ with all that God has brought into Him from time immemorial.

Now, isn't that wonderful? That means all the saints that are gathered into the presence of the Lord, we are organically one with them. God has been only doing one thing. The history of the church is not a whole series of little things that God has been doing, sort of doing a little thing here and doing a little thing there.

This century He does something and it breaks down. Then He does this here in another century and it breaks down. Then He starts again here and it breaks down.

And it has no relationship to the rest. What God has been doing is an essential entity. It is something which began at the cross.

Its dynamic was Pentecost. And God has never stopped working that work to this very day. And every single saint, whatever their color, whatever their race, whatever their nationality, whatever part of the globe they happen to live in, if they have been saved by the grace of God in any time, historically, as well as tonight, all those that have been brought into Christ, we are one body.

There is only one church. It is a vital principle. And as I have already said, it is because of ignorance of this principle that many, many moves of the Spirit of God have been undone and finally nullified and destroyed.

We have not understood this principle of continuity. I do hope that I am able, by the grace of God, to put over quite clearly what I mean. You see, so often I find that where the Lord has really started to show something to His people, especially younger people, and we are bowled over by what we see, we tend to get this idea that everything else has failed but us.

You know that kind of attitude? Everything else has failed. The Methodists failed. The Quakers failed.

The Puritans failed. The Moravians failed. The Brethren failed.

The Pentecostals have failed miserably. Everyone has failed but us. We have seen.

We have seen. We are a new thing. We are the new thing of God.

And we put a little circle round ourselves, and we get very superior about it. We feel everything else in the history of the Church has failed but us. And this is an invitation for God to leave us to the enemy's work.

For once we do this, we uncover ourselves in the most terrible way. Just like on a personal level, the Lord Jesus said to Peter, Simon, Simon, Satan has obtained thee by request, and I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not. He uncovered himself by making a claim from his own flesh life.

I will die with you Lord, he said, if I have to, but I will never deny you. And in that moment, he uncovered himself. Now in the same way, corporately, we often get into this trap where we think we are sort of succeeding where everything else has failed in the history of the Church.

We are, as it were, the unique work of God. I sometimes get letters sent to me by people who tell me that nothing has happened in that particular part of the world for a century or more. And they say, and now something tremendous has happened.

And I wait for them to collapse. Because I have never known anyone make such a claim without within a year or two they are completely bowled over and destroyed. Our problem is that sometimes we think that we have no link with anything that has gone before.

Nothing at all. We have nothing really to learn from what has gone before. And we have no organic link.

If we do, we only learn from it as a kind of historical object lesson. We don't understand that they are part of us. That we are part of them.

That all that God has done down through the ages is an essential unity. Where were the early Methodists? In Christ. Where were the early Quakers? In Christ.

Where were the Puritans? In Christ. Where were the Reformers? In Christ. Where were the early Brethren? In Christ.

And so are we. Do you understand? It's something that binds us together. Ignorance of this principle often leads to a rejection of all the values of the past.

As if what God is doing in our generation has got to be sort of unique in the sense that it draws nothing at all from the values and heritage of the past. You know, there are those, I feel sorry sometimes when we don't sing some of the old hymns that represent the values of what God has done in the history of the church. I know some of them are antiques and some are best left.

But there are some which I must say represent the choicest and most wonderful values that God wrought in His people in that day and age. And it belongs to us. It's not just that we're singing something antique.

We are expressing something that we've come into by the grace of God. It has cost the Lord and His people everything in something to recover those truths which are now household words with us. Again, another one of the problems is innovation.

Have you noticed how so often one of the things the enemy tries to do in new moves of God is to bring innovations in? Things that have never at any time been amongst the people of God from the day of Pentecost till today. Sometimes they are weird things. Sometimes they are things that are sort of hooked on some obscure passage of the Word of God and twisted and explained and then somehow you've got an innovation which sweeps through everything.

We find it again and again and again as if somehow or other we've got to find something which is novel, something that's never been done before, something which is unique, something which tempts us as a unique work of God. But my dear friend, that is not what God is doing. There is a sense in which every single thing we come into has already been in the church.

There is nothing new under the sun in this matter. People sometimes think that speaking in a tongue is somehow a new thing. My dear friend, they are ignorant of church history.

People tell me it died with the early church. When did it die with the early church? The Montanists spoke in tongues. The Waldensians spoke in tongues.

The Bogomils spoke in tongues. The Polysians spoke in tongues. The Anabaptists spoke in tongues.

Some of the Huguenots, the prophets of the Seven spoke in tongues. The early Methodists spoke in tongues. The Quakers spoke in tongues.

Where, where is all this nonsense? Is baptism something that came in with the late 19th century? Never! Never! The Waldensians practised baptism. The Bogomils practised baptism. The Polysians practised

baptism.

Now you are getting defogged by all these marvellous names. There is nothing new about it. The Anabaptists in the 15th and 16th century were drowned in their thousands in the fountains of Central Europe, sewed up in sacks, mothers and children, and flung into rivers.

But baptism by immersion, or believers, is a household word amongst the people of God now. Even Episcopalians slink away to some Baptist place to get baptised. And Presbyterians and Methodists and all go, they say, we recognise it.

But when the enemy is seeking to undo something, he, because of our ignorance of this principle of continuity, he presses in innovations, things that have never been known before, from the beginning until now. And by those things he seeks to divide and destroy the people of God in that generation. Now what I am saying is this.

I don't want to be on the negative side, I want to be on the positive side. We have a tremendous heritage, brothers and sisters, here, a family of God. It is the most wonderful privilege to be alive in the last half of the 20th century.

There are people who tell me they would have given a right arm to be there on the day of Pentecost. I wouldn't. Who wants to be there on the day of Pentecost? I think it is simply tremendous that we are here at the last part of the 20th century.

Don't you? You see, they were starting out, and it was wonderful when they were starting out and seeing all the wonderful works of God and the power of God, the signs and the miracles, authenticating the ministry and so on, and the gospel. But you know, I find it even more wonderful that we should come at the end of the age and have behind us a heritage which has cost the blood and life of thousands of God's choicest overcomers. Shall we trample it underfoot? Shall we treat it as refuse? Shall we look upon it as nothing to do with us, just a little sort of historical illustration of the power of God in such and such a century? Or did God do something then which is essentially part of what He is doing today? Only today He wants to lead us on just that step further with all that other fullness behind us, with all that heritage behind us.

He wants to take us on to the last step that will result in the coming of our Lord and the topstone going into place. One of the prophets once said to the children of Israel, as it is recorded in Isaiah 51, Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord. Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.

Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you. For when he was but one, I called him, and I blessed him, and made him many. For the Lord hath comforted Zion.

He hath comforted all her waste places, and hath made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of mellow death. I am asking you this night that you will remember all the way that the Lord our God has led us from the day of Pentecost.

Of course, if I had the time, I would like to go right back to our father Abraham and start there. And well we might. And go right the way through the whole Old Testament and into the New, but we haven't got time to do that.

The fact of the matter is this. That God has been doing something all the way through the centuries of this age. And the work that He has been doing is a continuous work.

It is a consistent and continuous work. Within it, therefore, we shall find all the values that we need for the day and age in which we live. Why should we be like an illustration of what Mark Twain said? From history we learn that we never learn from history.

If the people of God would only understand the ways of the Lord, understand some of those ways by which He led His own through the centuries of this age, we would be saved from many, many tragedies. And would become much more the wiser in our understanding of what God is doing in our own day. Now, I would like to just say something about the testimony of Jesus.

You will notice in that prophecy of Zechariah, in chapter 4, that the first thing that Zechariah saw was that lampstand all of gold. And he was very taken with the olive tree on either side which fed the lampstand all of gold. And, of course, we know, I think all of us, and I cannot go through it all to substantiate the claim, but I think most of us will recognize that that lampstand all of gold is a symbol of the testimony of Jesus.

We find it later on in the book of Revelation. We find that it stands for seven churches. The church expressed in seven localities.

But we discover that it is not just the church, because the lampstand could be removed, but the church, its activities, its meetings, its routines could just rumble on and the lampstand be taken away. The lampstand is not just the outward paraphernalia of the church. The lampstand stands for our Lord Jesus Christ, the testimony of Jesus, that Christ is everything.

And that in Him is everything we need, individually and corporately. Now, we find here in this Zechariah, chapter 4, that this lampstand stands for building. We immediately discover that the whole thing is to do with building.

It is an extraordinary vision. The first thing Zechariah sees is a great gold lampstand with its seven branches and its seven lamps alight. And then an olive tree on the left hand and on the right hand.

And then he sees from there pipes feeding gold from the olive tree into the lampstand. Extraordinary. And then he says to the angel, What are these, Lord? Meaning the olive tree.

Because he had some feeling that the olive tree was to do with him. We are all so self-centred. What are these, he said to the angel.

He forgot the lampstand altogether. He was most interested in where he came in the picture. He said, Now, what are these? And the angel said, This is the word of the Lord to the rubble.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain, before the rubble thou shalt become a plain? And the top stone shall be brought forth with shoutings of grace. Grace unto it.

The hands of the rubble laid the foundation. His hands shall also finish it. Now we suddenly discover to our amazement that this lampstand is not something static, but it represents a building work of God.

A building programme of God. Something that God is doing in His people, in His redeemed ones. He is calling them out of every nation and kindred and tongue and people and doing something in them whereby

Christ becomes in them everything in everyone.

If we had the time we could talk much more about it. But it comes down to locality. It comes down to the area in which we live and our relatedness with one another and so on.

Of course it must do all that. But what I am trying to simply say is this. That this lampstand is not some abstract glorious ideal that is set before the church.

It is not some beautiful ethereal thing somewhere up there in the heavenlies that no one ever sees but invisibly is taking place. It is a building programme that God is engaged in with living stones being built together upon a foundation. And so does the building go up that the word of the Lord comes to the rubble.

Who art thou, O great mountain? Before the rubble thou shalt become a plain. And the top stone, the last stone of the whole building programme, the top stone shall come forth with shoutings of grace. Grace unto it.

I have always been amazed that the word was grace, grace and not glory, glory. Good charismatics, I suppose, would all feel that the shout should be glory! God has done it! A great crest like a tidal wave has come in and the work is being finished. But I think that there will be such a conflict, such pressure, such intense pressure, so many complex problems that when the top stone, when the building is ready for the top stone, who is the Messiah? When the building is ready, all we shall be able to say when we see the Messiah is the grace of God has completed the work.

Grace began it, grace developed it, grace kept it moving and grace has completed the work. We read of the mystery of God in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 4 and 6. This is the same thought again. It is all to do with the testimony of Jesus.

We find it, for instance, in these words, whereby when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it has now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit. To wit, that the Gentiles, our fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel. Oh, what a wonderful thing this mystery is.

It has been hid. You see, I believe that God started this whole work with Abraham and that the saints of the old covenant are indissolubly joined to us and God has held them back, that they should not be made perfect without us. Isn't that wonderful? And we have been brought in.

Nevertheless, it is a new thing that God is doing in one sense. What is the new thing? That whereas in the old covenant the body was not revealed, this organic entity was not revealed, now it has been revealed by the Spirit of God. The coming of the Holy Spirit has brought the whole thing from outside to within.

And we are joined to the Lord and joined to one another in an organic union in Christ. What a wonderful thing it is that the book of Revelation tells us that the mystery of God is completed. It says in the founding as the seventh angel sounds, that the mystery of God is completed.

Thank God the battle over the mystery is going to be completed. The Lord is going to win this great battle. The purpose of God has never at any time been annulled nor even frustrated.

Jesus said upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Now you will see in some of your versions it is the gates of Hades. And some, the Revised Standard Version I think, puts it something about death.

The power of death I think it says or something like that. And some of the other modern versions, because this gates of Hades is a difficult idea. But what it means is this.

Gates are the strongest point in one sense. They are always a strong point in the walls. I mean the walls are the strong point but the gates are also very massive and strong.

And it was within the gates that the elders used to sit for judgment. It came to represent judgment or counsel. And so here we have the very judgment or counsel of hell.

I think in this the King James Version were quite right to use the word hell rather than Hades. Because really the idea is of death. But what is the weapon of Satan? What is his supreme weapon when he fights the building work of Christ? It is death.

Death and death and more death. That is how he always works. And we have here the very counsels of death.

If you like the Lord Jesus said upon this rock I will build my church and the counsel of Satan shall not prevail against it. The judgment of hell shall not prevail against it. The will and design of hell shall not prevail against it.

There is another way of looking at it which is deliberately ambiguous. It could mean that when the church presses into enemy territory the gates of hell or the counsel of hell to keep captives in its hold shall not prevail. Isn't that wonderful? When hell comes against us it is not going to prevail over us.

And when we by the grace of God and by the command and commission of our risen Lord go into the very realm of Satan to take out captives he will not be able to stop us. Gates can be unlocked. Gates can be locked up.

Unto thee have I given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. We must unlock gates at times and we must lock them up at other times. Oh, there is a battle over this purpose of our Lord.

All the combined power and authority of hell cannot deter our Lord Jesus from fulfilling His purpose to build the church. Christ's hands laid the foundation. His hands are going to finish the work.

Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. There are mountains before us. There have always been mountains before us.

There were mountains of difficulty and complexity before the early church. The Jewish Hebrew side found it very difficult to sit down and have a meal even with the Gentile side that was saying. And even the Apostle Peter got carried away at one point.

Don't you call that a mountain of complexity? I do. Circumcision was another great problem. It was a mountain of complexity.

Oh, they had so many problems. Sometimes they had immorality amongst them because those Gentiles coming in hadn't got the law sort of burnt into their beings as the Jewish side had. There were many, many

problems.

There have always been problems. Wouldn't you think that those poor souls called the Waldenses had problems? It was those that caused the Roman Catholic Church to withhold the Word of God from the ordinary people because they said these wild, wild, wild fanatics. They have got wild by reading the Word of God.

So they passed the decree the ordinary people shall not read the Word of God. Don't you call that a mountain of difficulty? I do. Oh, there were mountains.

But it doesn't matter what mountains have been before our Lord Jesus Christ in the fulfillment of His purpose to build the church, they have all become a plain. Not a single mountain has stood in the way of our Lord once He has moved forward in this fulfilling of His purpose. When we look at the book of Revelation we see false prophets and beasts and dragons, visions of the most terrifying creatures, world-wide systems that are anti-God and anti-Christ with supreme power seemingly.

But none of it stops the Lord Jesus from fulfilling His purpose and finally finishing the mystery, completing the mystery. It all comes to pass. Christ calls Himself in Revelation chapter 22 and verse 13 He says, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Oh, dear child of God, see this principle of fellowship. The principle of continuity. Jesus said, I am the Alpha and He is the Omega.

And dear child of God, we are all in between. He is the first and He is the last. Dear child of God, we are all between.

He is the beginning and He is the end. Dear child of God, we are all in between. Oh, to me it is such a thrill to think of those early ones who overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony because they loved not their lives unto death, whether they were polytheists or Bogomils or Donatists or Montanists or Priscillianists or whether they were Aldensians or whether they were the Reformers or whether they were the Huguenots or whether they were the Moravians or Quakers or Methodists or Anabaptists or Pentecostals whoever they are, we are bound together with them.

Jesus is the first and Jesus is the last. Jesus is the beginning and Jesus is the end. There is a continuity in this whole thing.

Dear, dear child of God, we have behind us tremendous wealth, that which God has wrought in the members of His Son's body. It has cost them everything. I very much love this title of our Lord Jesus in Revelation chapter 3 and verse 14 and to the angel of the church in Laodicea.

Right. These things saith the Amen. The faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

I think it is unparalleled grace that when the Lord speaks to the church of Laodicea He reveals Himself as the Amen. Amen. Amen is the last word.

You don't say anything beyond Amen or shouldn't. Amen. And that's the end.

I knew a little boy who used to think that when he heard people say Amen he got the right idea. He thought that meant the end of everything. So as soon as his parents began to talk too long without offense he began to say Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

He used to think that was the best way to shut them up. Because Amen was the ultimate. Amen.

Normally you understand that word as even so. Let it be. But Amen comes from the Hebrew Ma'amin.

And Ma'amin just simply means to have faith. And when you say Amen you are saying I've got faith. Faith.

Even so. Think of that next time you say Amen. And our Lord Jesus is the Amen to the purpose of God.

Even if you haven't got faith He has. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is going to carry the purpose of God through to its fulfillment. By the grace of God we are in something God began at Pentecost by His Spirit through Christ's finished work.

Oh dear child of God. The prophecy of Joel was never completely fulfilled in the day of Pentecost. I think most of you know that.

If you look at the prophecy of Joel in Joel 2 and compare it with Acts chapter 2 you have to come to the conclusion that it has not been fulfilled for it speaks of that great and notable day of the Lord. What does it mean then? It means this, that the Holy Spirit is to characterize the whole of this age. It was by the Holy Spirit that this age was ushered in on the day of Pentecost.

And every single move right through the history of the church of God in this age has been initiated by the Holy Spirit. Whether it has been keeping alive something in the dark ages, whether it was the recovery of something in the Reformation, or whether it has been in the successive recoveries that have come since then, it has been the Holy Spirit who has taken hold of men and women and used them in recovery. Now I don't want to bore you all because I know that most people are frightened to death of history.

And those especially Americans. Mind you, you are now coming of age. I don't wish to be superior.

But of course, you are coming of age. And increasingly you will be more and more interested in history if the Lord tarries. I wish we could learn the lessons of history.

I wish we could understand what God has done in history. Never at any moment, even in what are called the dark ages, has the testimony of Jesus been completely lost. It is a mistake to say that from the second century after Christ until the Reformation, everything was lost.

It is just not true. A study, an intensive and exhaustive study of the history of the Church of God will reveal some of the most remarkable movements of the Spirit in the so-called dark ages. You take these people called Montanists.

Why, the Charismatics haven't got a look in. The Montanists were the Charismatics of the fourth century. They shut the Roman Catholic Church.

Tertullian, the great church father, severed his connection with the institutional church. Please turn the cassette over at this point. There are many others too.

By the way, the Montanists joined the Montanists saying, where two or three are gathered together in our Lord Jesus Christ, there is the church. There are many others too. By the way, the Montanists never took the name Montanists.

That was given to them by everybody else. And the Donatists that came later, they didn't take the name Donatists. That was given to them by others.

And Paulicians, they were very proud because they said that they went right back to Paul himself. And so, they called them Paulicians because they had such an understanding of the eternal purpose of God and the mystery of Christ as found in the Pauline letters. And the Bogomils.

Bogomil is Bulgarian for friend of God. Sounds dreadful, doesn't it, Bogomil? But Bogomil just meant friends of God. They called them the friends of God.

All these were great movements. The Priscillianists in the south of France and Spain and Italy were one of the greatest movements of the Church of God. You see, these people, they saw certain principles.

They saw that a congregation should not be bossed by any other congregation. They saw that there should be elders in charge of the congregation. They saw the Lord's table as something that illustrated their fellowship together in Christ.

In some of these connections, they saw the matter of baptism. I mean, this is all the dark ages. We're normally told not a thing happened there.

And so much of the information we have about these people we can only glean from those who hated them and martyred them. And you know as well as I do when you read some of the little booklets that have been written about some of my friends and those that I have gained so much from the Lord through. If that was all we had, we would believe they were heretics.

Thank God, I think of Brother Farr. We have his ministry as well as the little pamphlets that were written against him. But all these names that have come to us, they were given to them by other people.

And much of what has so far been understood about these people has come from sources that were violently against them. And were out to blacken their name and to give the justification for their mass martyrdom. But oh dear, dear child of God, the fact of the matter is that in the darkest part of the dark ages, the testimony of Jesus never at any single point died out.

It was kept alive in different parts of Europe and Asia by the Spirit of God. And there were movements of the Spirit of God which cost the lives of those who were in it to obey the Lord and to serve Him. I wish I could say a good deal more about this but time does not permit us to.

I'd like to talk about the Waldenses and the Albigenses. I suppose most of you perhaps have heard of the Waldensian church. You have an airline here called Piedmont.

And of course it was in those valleys of the Piedmont that the Waldensians finally were driven and found their refuge. And I understand that no atheist ever travels on Piedmont. So I'm told and if you should have got on as an atheist you will never get off as an atheist.

So they tell me. I asked a while ago about the Piedmont folks and I found out that they were Waldensians who came to settle here in the United States. Anyway, that's by the way.

The fact of the matter is that we find different moves of the Spirit of God all the way through the dark ages. When we come to the Reformation era of course we begin to see something much more wonderful. We begin with John Wycliffe.

And I can only give you a few thoughts here. In 1320 in Britain he was an Oxford John and John Wycliffe was converted by reading the words of God in Latin. And God did such a work in his heart that as he began to investigate all the various activities and traditions of the church he became increasingly bothered that they did not size up to the Word of God.

And fearlessly he began to preach against various abuses of the church. He was hated for it. So much was John Wycliffe hated that they held a special council in London at which both the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury came as well as all the bishops of England and they had well nigh decided to burn John Wycliffe as a heretic but they adjourned for lunch.

And in that adjournment London was hit by one of the only earthquakes that has ever hit London. And the bishops were so frightened that they never reconvened and Wycliffe died in his bed. But Wycliffe was the man that set Britain on fire.

And they were called the Lollards. We don't know why they were called the Lollards. Whether it was because they talked so much or whether it was because of the way that they seemed to be drunk with the Spirit we don't know.

But this we know that they said if there are three men together in any place in Britain two of them are bound to be Lollards. That was the common saying that went over the whole of Britain. The only thing the church could do with Wycliffe was to dig up his bones one hundred years after his death desecrate them and throw them in the river.

I don't think that worried John Wycliffe. Jeremy of Prague heard John Wycliffe and caught fire and went back to Prague and began to preach in the university of Prague one of the oldest universities of Europe. A young man John Huss John Huss listened to him and caught fire.

And that man was to go over the whole of Bohemia modern Czechoslovakia and part of Germany and everywhere he went people found God and began to gather together in simple gatherings in farmhouses and homes simply having fellowship together and listening to the word of God. For John Wycliffe translated the Bible from Latin into English. And that was the greatest gift that he gave.

And from that it began to go out everywhere. The church caught John Huss at Constance and burned him at the stake. But when they burnt John Huss they set Europe on fire.

And from then on the reformation was underway. William Tyndale in Britain made it his lifelong ambition to take the Bible from the original Greek and later he wanted from the Hebrew and to put it into the language of the man in the street. A theologian was sent to convert him from his wicked ways.

But he said to that theologian he said, How long I shall see that every plough boy in England has the Bible in his mother tongue. William Tyndale was hounded from Britain to Brussels to Antwerp where finally he was caught strangled and burned. But before he died he prayed, Oh God open the king of England's eyes.

He died in 1536. In 1538 by royal proclamation a copy of the Bible in English was chained to a lectern in every parish church of England and Wales. The Bible that the whole establishment was for against God got into the hands of the people.

And do you know that at one time there were appeals made to the king that he should do something about it because in church services people were so bored with the vicar that they left him preaching in the pulpit

and went over round the lectern and had one of their number read the scriptures in English to them. They got more from the word of God than the vicar. Of course Erasmus was another man for which we must mention here in this reformation for God took hold of this man and as someone says Erasmus laid the egg that Martin Luther hatched.

The point was that Erasmus gave up for the first time the Bible in our tongue from the original Greek. Until then every version had been from Jeremy's old Latin. Now for the first time a Greek New Testament was put into the hands of people all over Europe.

It was revolutionary. It was that Greek New Testament that William Tyndale translated into English and has become really the basis of the King James Version. When Martin Luther came that man so hated by some bold stubborn courageous the reformation was fully come.

Nothing stopped Martin Luther. And you will remember that then by 1517 three things that caused controversy in the whole of the civilized world were household words and accepted by all true believers. First justification by faith in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

Secondly the access of every redeemed person to God through the Lord Jesus Christ without the need of a priest. And thirdly the sole authority of the word of God in all affairs to do with the people of God. Now those three things dear child of God you accept as bread and butter.

Who argues about justification? Who gets heated about justification? I wish they did. Everyone accepts it. Everyone accepts that we can go to the holiest place of all without a priest by the blood of Jesus.

That we can come before God and speak with Him immediately. All of us accept the supreme authority and inspiration of the word of God but it cost those men their lives. And it has come to us by the Spirit of God and given to us so that it has become our bread and butter.

We don't even argue about these things. It's passed as it were into what God has done. God recovered something in the Reformation that was never to be lost again.

To this very day it's not being lost. Oh there may be people who don't preach justification people who don't believe in the word of God but every true believer knows what justification is do they not? Every true believer understands that the word of God is authoritative and inspired. Since then since that Reformation there have been so many other things.

It would take us all night and all of tomorrow to really adequately deal with those many, many moves of the Spirit of God. But I can only touch on a few. There were what we call the Puritans.

You folks here in the United States must thank God for those Puritans. Because it was the persecution of the Puritans that really sent those founding fathers across the Atlantic to these shores. The very best of the people of God were expelled into a life of suffering and of endurance.

And they did it for the sake of our Lord. They could have so easily sacrificed everything for just a few adjustments on principle. But they would not.

They would not. The Puritans may be smeared at by some quarters, but they laid a foundation for us as the people of God that has never been taken away. They gave us a godliness and an attitude to the things of God which has permeated Christian things from that day to this.

We can divide the Puritans into three groups, basically. The Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, or Independents, and the Baptists. But in the very short time of that movement of the Spirit of God, and Calvin, and Knox, who were really the fathers of the Puritans, they had split into four great groups.

The Establishment, called Evangelical Churchmen, and these other groups. Now, let's just, for one moment, just think of the three groups. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists.

They gave us something which has never been taken away. It is an interesting thing now that all over our countries we are coming to recognize eldership as the recognized norm as far as God is concerned for the government of the people of God. Who gave us this innovation? Who recovered this truth? The Presbyterians.

They were called Presbyterians because they believed in Presbyters. Elders. They believed that the church should be ruled by a court of elders, a plurality of elders.

And I can't dwell anymore on that. The Congregationalists, they believed in the independence of every congregation. It was a fantastic view in the day that they set it forth.

But they believed that every congregation was a congregation consisting of the believers in any given locality that had no right to be bossed or dominated by any other congregation of believers. Oh, if only God had kept that thought alive. There is something that was recovered to us and cost the blood of many, the life of many, which in some of these movements of the church had been flung on one side.

And churches all over the place had been taken under the control of one or two or a group of individuals. But the Congregationalists saw that every single company of God's people locally constituted was independent and in direct liaison with God. They saw the need of course of fellowship between the companies but not domination by one company over others.

And then, of course, we have the Baptists and, of course, they practiced baptism by immersion. I hardly need to say that. And in Holland and in Britain and, of course, then over here increasingly more and more of these dear ones.

They gave us something which is now a household word but I have already mentioned it. Within a century after this great move of God, the whole thing had died. It had become institutionalized and crystallized, formal and dead.

And then God did a remarkable thing. A young man went everywhere through the Puritans seeking to find God. His name was George Fox.

But he could find God nowhere. Only he heard their choirs and their singing and their dead preaching. And he took his New Testament in English and he went out into the hills of Derbyshire and three years like a young hippie he sought for God wandering up and down Britain until one day he said, my heart burned and God showed me that Christ was my Savior.

George Fox had been converted. Now many evangelicals are very suspicious of the Quakers. They say that they are not really true evangelicals.

They are not really born again. Oh, it is rubbish. The Quakers were one of the greatest moves of the Spirit of God in the history of the church.

For they taught us a tremendous truth which I praise God at least as far as I am concerned and I believe many other believers have never yet been lost. And that is this. That it is the inward that is far more important with God than all the outward in the whole world.

Now what is needed is communion with God not just bread and wine. What is needed is to know what it is to die with Christ and to live in His resurrection not just baptism. What is needed is to know what it is to submit to one another not just elders.

What we need to do is to be built together not just have a nice church building. Oh, the Quakers went everywhere. They turned the world upside down.

The Puritans hated them. But the Quakers recovered something which has never been lost. That the nature of the church is essentially an inward thing.

An inward and organic thing. But listen to this. Do you know the Quakers used to meet together? Do you know they used to wait in silence? Not like they do today.

All that long silence and that kind of sentimentality twittering birds and lovely sunsets and all that kind of thing. That wasn't the early Quakers. They met together solid, sturdy, rough men and they would wait in quietness before God and before very long had gone someone would tremble with the power of God and would stand up and speak the word of the Lord and then someone would open up the Bible as they said and give a word from God and then someone would prophesy and then someone would worship God.

They didn't sing because they were a reaction against dead singing as they called it. It isn't amazing to me that the Quakers got the same results as the Pentecostals. I think it's amazing.

The Pentecostals also sometimes tremble and shake. And yet they sing beautifully. But the Quakers didn't believe in singing or music.

Isn't it interesting? One hundred years after that of course we have another great movement of God which I can only touch upon the Moravians. It began of course in Central Europe and was to be one of the most remarkable contributions of the Spirit of God to recovery in the history of the church. For up to then the Puritans had not really perhaps really considered too much the evangelistic mission of the church.

But the Moravians saw something that no one else saw. Not even the Quakers. They saw that there were people dying in outer darkness.

And that it was the commission of the church to take the gospel to them. And they said we will choose the hardest parts of the earth. They went to the Arctic.

They went to all the most difficult parts of the earth. They died in their hundreds. The Moravians had a prayer meeting 24 hours a day which lasted 100 years.

Now don't think I'm exaggerating. They had around the clock 24 hour prayer meeting which lasted 100 years. The Moravians.

It was the Moravians they were all connected by the way. You see how they're connected? George Fox would never have had a Bible in English but for William Tyndale and William Tyndale could have had for Erasmus. And Erasmus wouldn't have been awakened but for John Huss and for others and for Wycliffe.

And so we can see it all going on around. And now we suddenly find that there was a man who came over these parts of good Britisher. He came over here to convert you all on these sides.

And especially the Red Indians. His name was John Wesley. But in his journal he said Oh God I've come to convert the Indians but who will convert me? On his way over in the ship he heard singing in the most terrible storm.

There was a terrible storm. Even the captain was terrified. And Wesley said he would not admit it but he was frightened.

And he went down to the bowels of the ship and as he went down he heard singing. And he thought Oh! It must be heaven. And then he looked through a door and he saw a whole group of Moravians men and women and children.

He said just as if it was a drawing room meeting. They were sitting there singing hymns as if there was no danger at all. And Wesley in his heart longed to have the face that those Moravians had.

He never got it here in the States. He went back to of course it was a colony then. He went back to Britain and in Fleet Street in a little meeting in Fleet Street at which a Moravian preacher was preaching Wesley went along and what do you think the Moravian preacher was reading? He was reading the Preface to Romans by Martin Luther.

And as he heard that being read John Wesley said I felt a strange warming in my heart. God had saved me. And so began the first great evangelical awakening in the British Isles.

It was to spread to every part of Britain. John Wesley went everywhere. They turned him out of the churches so he stood on on the gravestones on the tombs and preached to the people in the graveyard.

Then they turned him out of the graveyard so he went to the fields. One time he preached to 30,000 men who were considered to be the off-powering of society. They were all minors.

And he said you know I was so dead as I preached to them that I could not believe that anything was happening until I saw a strange sight. I saw that all their faces were black and white stripes. And then I understood that they were weeping.

Thousands and thousands of people were saved all over Britain and here in the States. For those early Methodists came over here. Before long George Whitfield the other great colleague and companion in that move of God Whitfield and the Wesleys fell out from the whole matter of predestination and split the thing into almost a hundred years later simultaneously in Dublin Plymouth Bath and Bristol.

Companies of people came together seeking simply to meet as Christians and Believers without any regard to denomination. It was one of the most remarkable movements of the Spirit of God in the history of the Church. It was the beginning of what we now call Brethrenism.

It was to spread over the whole British Isles and far, far beyond and to have an influence upon the things of God such as no other movement of the Spirit of God has had. These people oh by the way the Wesleyans gave to us something, I should say this you see the Puritans never accentuated new birth but the Wesleyans emphasized being born again and they gave us this truth which has never again been taken away from us that we are to be born again and they gave us also something else that there is an

assurance of salvation to be had. There is an experience of the Spirit of God to be had.

The Brethren gave to us another wonderful truth that all the people of God are one. We all belong to one another and they emphasized the coming of the Lord as no other group had before them had done. Oh the simple way in which they break bread together and they worship the Lord together this giving as it were over to the Spirit of God to lead whom he would in worship and praise and in serving the Lord together.

Some of these features have been in the others by the way. The Wesleyans had had class meetings in the early days where they used to meet together and one would have a hymn and one would have a scripture and one would have a testimony and one would pray as led of God. The Quakers also they'd all had these features you see in their beginnings but I must hasten on or we'll be here all night.

The brethren gave us the Spirit of God to cover the unity of God's people through the brethren and gave it to us in a way that has never been lost at least for the true believers. And then in 1906 with many things before it we had the advent of Pentecostalism. Some people don't really recognize Pentecostalism as a move of God at all.

But we have to. More recently there has been a history written for the first time from the academic point of view of Pentecostalism and when you really read it in a detached way you have to recognize that God was in this thing. For God was telling us that the gifts of the Spirit are not lost but they are present in the body of Christ.

That there is an imbuement with power from on high. Now you see dear child of God if we were to bring all these features together we'd have fullness. The tragedy of the whole thing is that nearly every single one of these movements within 20 years has been major divisions.

The Puritans within 15 years divided into four. The Reformers within a matter of 20 years divided again into three major groups. The Quakers didn't get divided thank God.

No much later. The Methodists divided within the first 20 years within 20 years divided into two huge groups Whitfield on one side the Wesley's on the other. The Brethren within 20 years divided into open brethren and exclusive brethren.

The Pentecostals were not going more than 10 years before they were divided in so many divisions it's impossible to enumerate them. But isn't that amazing? Of course since then there have been some remarkable things in modern history. We of course must mention what happened in China with our brother Watchman Lee.

We must mention also what happened in our country with that prophet of God Austin Scott. And we are now in a move of God which I believe we are being pushed into by political and economic pressures behind which stands God. We are being pushed into a discovery of one another again.

We are being pushed into fellowship with one another. We are being pushed into a sort of a grassroots participation. Do you understand? Everywhere I go now in universities everyone wants grassroots participation.

The students want to take part. They want to be able to talk back and all the rest of it. And so now at last something is happening in the church of God.

The old pulpit-pube relationship appears to have gone forever thank God. Because something is happening. There would never have been a reformation but for economic and political pressures.

God was behind them. Now God has turned the whole table around and is using something to push us back to finding one another in the Lord. Moving together in the Lord.

The expression of our priesthood as believers in the Lord. All these things. I don't believe as we come to the end of this age as we enter into whatever however long this last phase will be I don't believe that we can cut ourselves off from all that's gone before.

It is a continuity. God forbid that any one of us should cut ourselves off from what God has done in the past. We belong to them and they to us.

It leads me finally to say then what are the lessons we learn from these? I shall only enumerate them and not spend time on them. But here are the lessons. Within a generation most movements of the Spirit of God have formalized and died and crystallized into institutions.

In nearly all of them within twenty years major division has resulted with the fragmentation of the whole. It is an interesting fact that God who is absolutely sovereign appears not to be bothered about keeping alive these things. Now this must be a question to all of you who are students of the world.

Why if God is sovereign does he not keep alive these things? It seems to me that once the first generation is over it's as if God says well now we'll let that die. As if God gets in the first generation and the second generation if they're in the good of the first all the values he wants are lost. And then he lets it down.

In other words it seems to me that the materials for the city of God are produced by the Spirit during the beginning of these movements and is never never lost. In every single thing that God has ever done by his Spirit in the history of the church it may seem that man has destroyed it. It's not been destroyed.

God has caught it up to heaven. It is the man child. It's gone into heaven.

The gold. The precious stones. The pearl of Christ's nature lost in his people in the most difficult circumstances has gone into the city of God and at the end you'll find it there.

Sometimes people think that what happened in China has perhaps all been lost. No, no, no, no, no. All the values of what God did in China are in the city.

And in the end you shall find them there. On every single generation in the history of the church God has brought all that together. Recovery appears to be progressive.

We find for instance justification the access of every redeemed child of God into the presence of God through the Lord Jesus. The word of God is authoritative. We find congregations independent congregations if you like however you like to put it.

Eldership. Baptism. The inward nature of everything in the church.

New birth. Oneness of the people of God. The gifts of the Spirit.

Endowments with power. I wonder what God is trying to do in our day. I have sometimes wondered whether God is trying to reveal to us and finally recover the outward nature of the vessels.

That we might finally understand what kind of vessel it is that all this is to be contained within. I don't know. But what I do know is this that what has been recovered by the Spirit of God through the history of the church has never again been lost in the real people of God in every generation those values live on.

That's why I'm so concerned and why I felt I should speak about this principle of continuity. Why should we cut ourselves off from it? Why impoverish ourselves as if it doesn't belong to us? As if it's just history? It is all ours. And we, dear child of God, have something to add in our day and generation.

May God make us faithful. So, it seems to me that we have in that whole matter an illustration of the overcomer and the whole people of God. You will notice that once something has been lost every time God recovers it it is through that little remnant that little minority amongst the people of God who have been prepared to lay down their lives and suffer whatever it is for the whole not to be a superior elite in a circle but for the whole church of God.

May the Lord teach us what it means to be an overcomer. That is, that in our day and generation we may be those who are prepared to go the whole way with the Lord whatever the price, whatever the cost, to lay down our lives so that all the people of God in our day and generation may benefit. May the Lord help us and keep us.

Vision determines how long any move of the Spirit of God lasts. It's interesting that the Brethren have lasted in life the longest of many of these moves of God because they saw something more than many others. May God make us people of vision, real vision, people who have an understanding of the will of God, an understanding of the purpose of God.

Shall we pray? Dear Lord, help us to understand what has been said this evening. We are all, Lord, in, as it were, this one thing that Thou has been doing, Lord, through this age. Help us, Lord, to understand it and help us to draw from all those values that Thou has recovered and deposited, as it were, in the life of Thy people.

We don't want to do without any of them, Lord. We want these features to be found in our gatherings. We want, Lord, somehow or other that all these things that have been so fragmented and isolated in sort of crystallized denominations may somehow or other be brought together in a fullness and that we may express, dear Lord, something of Thy full mind in these days in which we live.

Only Thou can make this word this evening a living reality to us all. Do it, Lord. We ask it in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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