

# The Church - Part 10

by Les Wheeldon

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*The sermon emphasizes the critical role of forgiveness and the cross in achieving unity within the Church, illustrated through character studies of David and teachings from Jesus.*

**Duration:** 1:04:53

**Topics:** "Church"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the theme of unity and forgiveness in chapter 18 of the Bible. He emphasizes the importance of not offending or despising others, especially the little ones. The speaker also highlights the need to embrace the cross and love the unlovable in order to win people to Christ. He encourages the church to prioritize love and unity over personal preferences and to rely on God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in evangelism.

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## Transcript

Well, we turn tonight again to the question of unity in the Church, and I want to talk about unity from certain character studies in the Old Testament tonight. Next week I will probably go on to look at something like Ephesians and some of the themes in Ephesians, which of course unity is a big theme in the book of Ephesians, but if anybody would like me to speak about any aspect of Church life that I haven't covered so far, please ask me and we will, I'll consider it and fit it in, all right? So anything that's not covered so far that you'd like to be covered, please ask me, either tonight or sometime in the next week, let me know and I'll consider it. Now, we can start actually in Matthew chapter 18, because Jesus spoke about the Church only twice by name, Matthew 16 and Matthew 18.

It's Paul who gives us much of the understanding of the Church, and we're left to wonder what we would have understood about the Gospel and the Church without the ministry of the Apostle Paul. So we have to go and look at something of the writings of Paul, which is why I say we'll go to Ephesians to look at some of the teaching on the Church. Perhaps the greatest letter on the Church is the Ephesian letter, but when we look into the second, we already looked at chapter 16 earlier in our first studies, but in chapter 18, the subject of the chapter is unity and unity through forgiveness.

And it tells us in verse 15, he's spoken in the context of offending and the great sin of offence of children, and he warns, Jesus warns them that they are not to offend one of these little ones. And he also says in verse 10, take heed that you despise not one of these little ones. And it is so easy to despise.

To despise someone, you don't have to say a word against them. You only have to think of them in a disparaging way. You look down on them, and you hear somebody pray and cry out to the Lord, and you despise them.

And somebody responds, I wouldn't do that. And the person who is most damaged is you. When you despise someone, you have to watch it, because what you're damaging is your own soul.

For example, you despise someone who responded to the Lord, and you said that's emotional. And if your need was to be released emotionally, you are despising God's way for you. You need to respond from the depth of your heart, sometimes very emotionally.

Apparently, to others, but you need to respond, and you're not to despise anyone. And we could look at what he says there about children and so on. But we'll go to verse 15, where it says, moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his faults between thee and him alone.

If he shall hear thee, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church.

But if he neglects to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen man, or as a tax collector, a sinner. Verily I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again I say to you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Then came Peter to him and said, Lord how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus said unto him, I say not to thee till seven times, but till seventy times seven.

And then he gives the parable of the unforgiving servant and the forgiving king. You know the story in chapter 18 verse 23, it tells us that a man owed a king ten thousand talents, which is approximately several billion pounds, all right? I didn't make a mistake, several billion pounds. A talent was worth about, oh I've forgotten, whether it's a half a million pounds or what in our modern, he owed him something like five billion pounds.

And the other man owed him about five hundred a thousand pounds, something anyway, not inconsiderable. But one was forgiven five billion. It's a debt you could never pay and he would not forgive a debt that could be paid and that's the parable.

But so here we've got unity in the church and here notice the importance of forgiveness. If there is not forgiveness in the heart of the church, in the hearts of believers, then there is no unity and there will be disunity and there'll be problems. Now not all disunity leads to split.

Some disunity leads to simply dragging your feet. And if a church drags its feet, I'm not going to do what he does, who sees and hears, then the church will be slowed down terribly. Prayer meetings will become a drag because people will not be there with all their hearts.

You know if somebody comes to the prayer meeting and does not come with all their heart, I would advise them not to come. Best not to come than to sit and observe and discourage the brethren. You know I've

noticed this, that sometimes I can pray with two or three people in real unity and time can go, I can forget where I am and it's wonderful in the presence of God.

Then you get together with an unwilling number of people who are not one and it can be very difficult and vice versa. It's not the number but it's the unity of heart and thereby you have to have forgiveness. And Peter at the end of the reading said, how often shall I forgive my brother? He said seven times and he was being very virtuous.

He was being a good boy, he was, because in those days there are commentaries written about what the scribes taught and we can study them today. I don't know where but apparently you can study them. And they taught that if you forgive someone once, very good, forgive them twice, yes forgive twice, but the third time send them away.

That was the teaching of the scribes, forgive once, forgive twice, then it's finished, punished. And so when Peter said seven times he was being, wow that's very good isn't it, seven times more than the scribes were teaching. And Jesus said forgiveness is right out of the realm of man, it's in the realm of God.

Seven times, seventy, never-ending forgiveness. And there's the foundation of church unity, forgiveness. There will be things about each other that we do not like and sometimes things are said that person says he has no idea of offending you.

So what do you do? You go and seek them out and say, my brother I'd like to say something to you offended me. And you lay out all your reasons why you're offended, why you're not talking to them, why you're not agreeing with them. It's amazing the grounds people have for lack of forgiveness.

Notice here too that in verse 15 there is a rule here and I mentioned this last week but I'll mention it again now that there is to be no public criticism of any person. You know if you have a church meeting and you want to raise a matter that is critical and negative about the leadership or any person in the church, you are wrong to raise it in a church meeting. You know we're democratic, no we're not democratic, that's the first thing.

We're ruled by God, not by the rules of, we've got free speech haven't we? Of course we have free speech. But the bible warns us not to give our grievances a public airing until we have tried the method of sorting them out privately. If anybody brings a criticism of the leadership and has not met them privately they have disobeyed Jesus Christ and they're endangering church unity.

They must not do it. You must honor the Lord and seek to do it in a Godly way. Go and meet the leaders or meet this brother or whatever it is and lay before them.

You know maybe it's a misunderstanding, maybe it's something that can be sorted out, maybe we'll give that person the opportunity to raise it from their point of view and correct it themselves without you having to say a word. There are ways of operation in the church which cause unity to be maintained and I'm not just talking about the lack of a split, God forbid we should have splits, we don't want that, but what I'm talking about is positive love and strength of pulling together among the believers. This is unity.

Unity is not the absence of division only, it's something positive and it tells us here that if we will be one through forgiveness, if we will seek to be one and to be in love and kindness to each other, look at the promise here, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and he refers here to this domain of praying, whatever they shall ask, verse 19, it shall be done for them of my father which is in

heaven. There is power in the midst of a unified church for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them and the presence of God in the midst of his people is conditional on our unity. First of all the unity between twos and threes, but then beyond that to larger groups of people joining together in goodwill.

Notice also here that it delays the highest level of authority in the church is the church together. There is a moment when two brothers can't agree, when one is continually saying something against another and continually criticizing them privately, that person must be challenged according to this scripture and if there is a real issue it must be taken ultimately to the church. Terrible thought to think of being put out of the church, but this is what he is saying here.

The ultimate cause would then be of course a heathen and a republican can attend the church as a heathen and as a republican. What a sad and grievous punishment, but as the scripture says, hopefully to bring that person to repentance. Let's turn now to the Old Testament because I want to turn you to the question of forgiveness and unity in a wider sense by looking at a character study and I want to look at the character of David.

Turn to the Old Testament, to 1st and 2nd Samuel. You'll know that there's a book written, one of the best books by this man, I'm not particularly recommending all that he's written, but there's a book called the Tale of Three Kings. Who's the author? I forgot the author.

King Edwards and it's about Saul, David and Absalom, these three kings, King Saul, King David and King Absalom and it talks about the relationship between these men. David is the central person and when you look at the life of David there's one simple great key in the life of David and that is the cross. David was a man of the cross and all the problems that ever came in his life came when he was rejected or no longer lived by the cross and we'll look at that in a moment but the way David's life progressed was because he constantly, except for one major exception, he constantly embraced the cross and that is the foundation of church unity.

First of all we said forgiveness and that's included in the cross but much more than that, the willingness to lay your life down for another. This is the foundation of church unity. If we're not willing to lay our lives down we will forgo positive unity and just be a group that meets just like other groups meet.

There'll be other societies, gardening societies, all kinds of things and they'll meet once a week and they'll have their social events and they'll have their arguments and their jealousies and their rivalries but the church is to meet without jealousies, without rivalries, in the unity of the family of God with absolute unity through the cross and when we look at these three men, I'm not going to look at them in detail obviously, but the truth is that David himself demonstrates a man who embraced the cross. Now the first man of our three studies then would be Saul and you'll know that Saul was this man who was raised up of God and he was chosen by the people, chosen of God. He was a man of natural stature, a man of natural height like me, sorry about that, and he was head and shoulders above everybody else.

I'm head and shoulders above most but not all physically but there we go and he was established in the kingdom and you'll know that he was given the spirit of God as a young man and he ruled for a number of years, 40 years in total and he really continued without deep problems, really compromising the way of God, getting worse and worse. There's a terrible moment in the life of Saul which is in 1 Samuel chapter 16, after he had done various things, he disobeyed with Amalek, he'd compromised in various ways, we're not going to look at that but in verse 14 of chapter 16, the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. I suppose

that's one of the worst verses you could ever read in the whole Bible.

The spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, the spirit of the Lord departed from Samson. David prayed at his lowest moment, he said take not your Holy Spirit from me. But here he is, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

Now if that verse causes you to fear, that is not a bad thing but I wouldn't have that verse terrify you because the spirit was given to Saul in chapter 9, it departed from him in chapter 16, seven chapters. You might say oh dear, that didn't last long, it didn't last long did it? But it actually was 30 years or something of his life, 35 or more years of his life. Saul was under the influence of the Holy Spirit for most of his kingship, 30 something years he was resisting and disobeying and walking against the way of the Lord.

He only walked with God one year, the first year of his kingship and then for year after year after year the Holy Spirit kept on with this man and worked in him and remained with him despite the fact that he did not cooperate with the Holy Spirit. So the truth is here that God did not give him the Holy Spirit on Monday and take the spirit on Tuesday. God gave him the spirit in 1960 and removed the spirit in 1995 after years and years and years of disobedience.

That's the kind of timescale. So don't be afraid that God just gives and takes away the first of the problems. God is a God of determination and patience, long-suffering, he does not remove his Holy Spirit quickly.

It is at the end of much much patience and here he is at this moment and then of course in chapter 16 we read also of the anointing of David. David is anointed and we'll go on to chapter 18. This is after the great victory of David.

David is being established, he's a young man, Saul an old man. He's not equal in age one has walked long in compromise and now here's the young man starting off his life really young, late teens, 20s, very blessed of God and where Saul should have looked on David as a father he looks on David as a threat and in chapter 18 we read this that verse 7 the women answered one another as they played and said Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands and Saul was very wroth and the saying displeased him and Saul eyed David from that day and you can read in that chapter how he tries to murder him, murderous instincts. You know that we would be idealistic and say that the church is a wonderful place but you know that the church can become as much a place where there can be a murderous instinct in the heart of a brother or sister.

We are never to think that any context is beyond temptation. Remember that the greatest sin of all the ages was that of Satan, the irredeemable sin of Satan which he committed in paradise, in glory without any tempter. He committed sin without any example.

He committed sin surrounded by beings of purity and light. You are not to think that sin is only conceived in conditions of temptation. Sin can be conceived in the heart simply by the awfulness of jealousy.

That's exactly the original sin of Satan was jealousy. I believe that he was jealous of man, jealous of Jesus and jealous of man. I believe that was Satan's sin, jealous of his position.

It speaks of those who kept not their first estate. The very first sin of all is connected with jealousy and envy. In the glory he looked at someone else's position and said I want that and was not content with his own.

And how sad that many church divisions that we could read of in church history have occurred because one man has looked on another and said I want what he's got. And the church spirits can be traced back to similar things. Ambition, jealousy between men.

And it is written that the devil was a murderer from the beginning and a liar from the beginning. The beginning of all lies, all murder, all these awful things was from that blessed place where he sinned before the throne of God. There was a time without sin and it began in that heart with jealousy.

And we can simply note here in, I don't want to go on and look at this in detail, simply to note that the reaction of David is not to fight but to embrace the one who has wronged him with love. You know that this is what he did when he was attacked. He never responded by trying to attack.

He never answered soul in kind. He always responded with a heart of humility and laying down his own life. And there's the principle of the cross that the just must die for the unjust.

This is the principle of church unity. The just must die for the unjust. If there is none willing to die then there is none just.

The proof that any man can ever be right is not because of a process of argument but from the demonstration of his spirit. We are to demonstrate the spirit of the crucified one and by that means alone are we righteous. And by that means alone are we united.

We cannot be in any other way. I want to leave this with you in great detail but I want to turn right over now into chapter 11 of 2 Samuel because I want to look at the great division that occurred in Israel between Absalom and David. The root of the division actually was in the heart of David.

That sounds strange doesn't it? He was the man who embraced the cross always and as I said it was when he ceased to embrace the cross for a moment had a holiday from the cross. You know when you want a holiday that's normal, you're tired. But beware when you want a holiday from the cross.

I've laid my life down long enough it's somebody else's turn now. This is a great wickedness. Just imagine if God should say that.

I can also warn you that tiredness does not come from the laying down of your life. Tiredness comes and exhaustion in a dangerous sense comes not from the cross but from the refusal of the cross. There is exhaustion when you need a break and you need to, that's right God will give it to you.

God will not kill us and destroy us. But there is another dimension where you say I want a break from this kind of life. Beware there is none.

The only way you can have a break from the cross is by turning your back on Jesus. You can never leave the way of the cross. If you leave the way of the cross you will argue, you will defend, you will be bitter, you will be unforgiving and you will sin.

There's no holiday from the cross. We are crucified with Christ, how can we leave it? But in chapter 11, again I'm not going to go into detail on this because it's not really my subject, but I just want you to notice that when David in chapter 11 verse 1 it tells us, 2nd Samuel 11 verse 1, it tells us that David was on holiday from the war and that is the source of all his sin. The devil finds work for idle hands could never be more true than this one.

Idle minds, it doesn't mean to say that you can't rest your mind but there is a state of mind that is not right, that is idle and that is lazy and is wide open for temptation and some temptations come because a lot of spiritual concentration. There is natural concentration, there is spiritual concentration. Spiritual concentration is what all men have on something and it doesn't exhaust them.

You'll find men, I believe there's a big football match tomorrow night. I'm not interested in football. I couldn't even be absolutely sure it's England and Scotland again.

There you go, not that interested in it. I wouldn't even care if I never heard the results, that's just me. I'm not saying it's wrong, I'm just not interested in football.

Sorry to disappoint you men but I'm not. But there'll be people there tomorrow night with absolute concentration. They will enjoy it.

They won't be saying, oh I've got to do my homework tonight, I've got to go and watch a match. And you'll see people doing that and it will refresh their microcosm. They will be having their recreation by watching something with absolute concentration.

But you see the truth is when Jesus Christ captivates you and grips you, you can go and spend time in his presence and not count prayer as a work or a burden but as a refreshing and a joy. There is prayer that is the work and the burden but there's also the joy of prayer. Anyway he was on holiday.

He was relaxing there when other people were in the war. People were dying. And so he, well we don't need to go into the detail, but you know he committed adultery.

And these chapters warn us that no man is beyond temptation, not one. And when he sinned and you find that Uriah was a man who would not compromise with his heart, his great desire to be in the war with the Lord's people. He would not do anything other than keep his eyes on Israel in battle.

That's where his heart was. Uriah's heart was on the battlefield. He was reluctantly in Jerusalem and his heart was carrying him away back there.

He wasn't in fellowship with David. And so the sin takes place and everything and you know the murder. He murdered Uriah and so on.

We won't go into any detail on that. We'll just leave it all aside. But then we turn to chapter 13.

David has now gone through his correction. He's been discovered. And now he's facing another problem.

Immediately the next thing is this man David has sinned. He has compromised righteousness and the result is now going to be outworked in his own spiritual sons. Now these are his physical sons, but our errors if we do not thoroughly repent of them will be outworked in our spiritual sons.

Why? Well Absalom had a sister whose name was Tamar and Amnon the son of David, Absalom's half-brother, loved his half-sister Tamar. And you know that he raped her in this chapter. This awful event.

And the reaction of David to this sin is to keep quiet. And because David is now compromised, why did David not intervene into this great problem in Israel? The answer was because he himself was a compromiser. He had no moral authority.

You know that in all matters of spiritual authority you can only have it in as much as you yourself are what you preach. The church must be what we preach as a church. We we lose our authority.

Individually and corporately we lose our authority if we do not live consistently with what we preach. And David could not rebuke and reprove his son. He could not punish him because he had lost the authority.

And so he let the injustice in Israel. The injustice led Absalom to take matter in his own hands and kill Amnon and division was posed in Israel. You know that we must be absolutely clear.

We must give clear judgments. We must not lean back defending ourselves by allowing unrighteousness. The preaching ministry will ultimately defend itself, its own compromises.

All our compromises in our lives as preachers we will defend by what we don't preach against. We will be silent on them. We must not close our hearts to the searching matters of scripture.

It's like how can we exhort the flock to prayer and fasting. I'm not talking now to leaders. I know I'm not talking to leaders.

I'm talking to us all. But the truth is this. We must watch what we avoid both in scripture.

You'll find this. We must watch it and we must face up to it in the light of scripture and go through with God. And so there was this compromise in Israel.

Those things weren't quite clear and now Absalom has to flee and there's division in Israel now. Two brothers absolutely divided, murder and the man in exile. Oh dear what's all this about? And then you'll know let's move on now into chapter 15.

Chapter 15. Here's Absalom now. He secretly hates David, his own father.

He's brought back into fellowship with David but he hates him because of the injustices that have gone before. If David had acted righteously Absalom would not have had to take matters into his own hands. He would not have had to spend years in exile.

He would have been absolutely clear with his father. But now Absalom hates his father. Here he is in chapter 15.

He's using flattery. He's using very fair words. Verse 3. Absalom said to him see thy matters are good and right.

You poor man you've really been hard done by. A plague on anybody who speaks like that. Yes.

How could we destroy hearts? But there's no man dead. There's nobody really can deal with you. It's really not right is it? Isn't Israel in need of something? Oh dear we need something more here.

Oh that I will make judge if I was made an elder. You know I'd be all right. I thought it all out.

If I was made judge in that land. Oh I would do it. I thought it all out.

Easy to criticize. You know I often think in government you can see it. Opposition is much easier than government isn't it? It's very easy.

It is very very easy to oppose. Tell the government what they're doing wrong. It's very hard for the government to admit what they've done wrong.

Very hard. Very hard for them to be absolutely honest and truthful. And anyway we're not to let this come into the church.

And I believe that when anybody gets to the place of prime minister I think they all, they begin to realize how hard it is. I don't believe any government who says we've got the economic policy, we've got the economy stable. It's God who allows the economy to be stable.

It isn't the government. I know they do some things right, they do some things wrong but it's the grace of God on the nation. Once they, once God says that's it, doesn't matter what they do in government, it'll go.

Anyway here's Absalom in verse 5 kissing people and kissing their hand. Oh isn't he lovely? He's a really nice chap this one is. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment.

So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And it's possible for men to steal the hearts away from Jesus. Leadership has a tremendous, a tremendous gift of leadership.

You know that when you are a leader and you have leadership qualities, then you have a unique power to rob the hearts away from Jesus. You're not to play for the gathering if you're a leader. If you've got some charisma from God and some gift, you're to know when you can tie people's hearts to yourself.

If you do, you will ultimately divide God's people. I am of Paul, I am of Apollos. This can happen on any level.

But you could hear sometimes in a summer conference, somebody might say, oh wasn't he good? This is of the people, you know, wasn't he good? I like him and I don't like him and he doesn't. Watch out. Watch out preachers as well.

If we ever play to that gallery, there'll be division. We're not to do it. We're not to attach anybody's hearts to ourselves.

We are not to be partisan. We are to love all. The cross has got to be very, very deep in our thinking, in our speaking, in our actions.

There must be no lack of the cross in anything we do. If there is, it will divide us. So he drew the hearts aside and he prepared a great rebellion, quietly drawing everybody after him.

And wasn't he such a lovely chap and everybody liked this? And sooner, before they all noticed it, they've gone against David. And David's forced into exile. And the true heart of Absalom is revealed.

He's murderous. He wants to kill David. And so we get to chapter 16.

We're getting to the heart of the whole matter slowly. It's going to get to the heart of the matter in chapter 90, but in chapter 16, here's David. He is cast out of his kingship and he seems to be full of grief, but not for himself.

The cross is full of grief, but not for yourself. And he comes here in chapter 16, is a type of the cross itself. He goes up the Mount of Olives.

And here in Mount of Olives, here's this man, verse 5, a man whose name was Shimei. He came forth and cursed David because he was losing in the battle. He cast stones at David and he cursed.

And Abishai, verse 9, the son of Zeruijah said to the king, why should, this is verse 9 of chapter 16, why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Here's the arm of flesh defending the king. Oh, here's Peter. I'm, oh what, let's get up and defend him.

Why are we just, yes, let me go over I pray thee and take off his head. Wow, this is real action isn't it? The king said, what do I have, what have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruijah? And the sons of Zeruijah, it's like the sons of Zebedee and the sons of, you know, Peter, James and John. Shall we command fire to come down on them? David says, I'm not like you.

In other places, you're too hard for me, you sons of Zeruijah. Let him curse because the Lord has said to him, curse David. What, who shall then say wherefore have you done so? And here's this statement, when things are rocky in relationships, and this happens, on a small level between one brother and another brother, between two sisters, it can occur between all levels in the church, it can happen.

One is against another, and here's the great heart of a man of God when he says, it's of God. Let it, don't answer this criticism in like. That's a man of God.

If he's cursed and criticized me, it's of God. I don't need to fight it. We said last week that the enemy wants to bring the churches out of the heavenlies.

If you go in to fight your brother, you will certainly go out of the heavenlies. If you can abide in the cross and receive everything that is of God, you will abide in the heavenlies. You won't lose the presence of God.

Stay there. This is what David did. David said, no, I'm not going to fight this man.

God told him to curse me, that's fine. And he said, behold, my son who came forth of my bowels seeks my life. How much more? Now may this Benjamite do it.

Let him alone, let him curse for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day. And that's the cross.

Jesus was made a curse for us, and he received the curse on the cross, that it may be made good for us. The very heart and center of all that we are, is the cross. We are nothing without the cross.

We're nothing. We're just like the world without the cross. We've not got a choice between going deeper in the cross and being shallow in Christian things.

It's a choice between the world and the cross. There's no other middle ground. We can be a worldly church without all the trappings of the world.

We can absolutely reject all what we consider signs of the world, and shut ourselves in our churches and be as worldly as they, if we reject the cross. We must embrace the cross. So David embraced it and said, no I will not answer so.

This is of God, and he saw God in it. And then he prays that the, in this same chapter he says, and he prays that the council of Ahistophel would be turned into foolishness. I can't see the verse, it doesn't

matter.

And this is again the council, this is God making the wisdom of the world foolishness. It's all the cross in this. This is the cross in David's life.

And then in chapter 18, Absalom is slain. This is the battle is going on. Verse 5 of chapter 18, the king commanded Joab, Abishai, Ittai saying, deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.

And all the people heard, deal gently with my enemies, this is the heart of the cross. Deal gently with them. Let the nail go in you, don't let it go in him.

Deal gently with Absalom. You know when you begin to look at the patterns of how does the church stay one, well we avoid all, we avoid all these subjects, we avoid all that. No, no you, you embrace the cross.

Deal gently with Absalom. Everybody heard it. But Joab wasn't a man of the cross.

He didn't care about Absalom, whatever happened. He wanted revenge. It's amazing that there can be some terribly bitter words from Christians, vengeful, cruel words, only revealing that their hearts have never seen the truth of the cross.

You are to love those who hate you. Well, there's no other way. Deal gently with the man who wants to kill me.

That's Jesus with Judas. He dealt gently with him. You know there is no greater power than to deal gently with your enemies.

There's nothing greater. It's easy to curse them and shout at them and hit them and criticize them. There's no power neither there but to deal gently with your enemies.

That's the power of God. We want the power of the Holy Ghost then we need the power of the cross. This is the power that makes the church the church.

And you know that Absalom was killed. And at the end of chapter 18, here we've got the heart of the matter, here it is, the enemies, verse 32, the news is brought that Absalom is dead. Verse 33, the king was much moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept.

And as he went thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee. O Absalom, my son, my son, only I could die and stop this. That's the heart of God isn't it? That is the cohesion of the church.

We will not lay our lives down for each other. What have we got? But as we lay our lives down there's a power at work. You know you ought to be so loving to each other.

You know this week, coming week, you want to pray, you want to go in prayer. Is that the one thing to do? When you pray tomorrow, take your fellowship list, if you've got no dress list, don't pray for yourself and your own. Pray for those people on that list, one after the other, and pray for their ears and their own.

You know you can be incredibly self-centered in spiritual exercise. Part of the thing is that you think, well I've got to do this, you've got something in your mind that you want done. God has got to liberate you from self to the point where you can see there's something else he wants to do, and that if you will be released

from self and believe God, that will help all the things to flow into place that you want done.

You ask a mister, you may consume it upon your own lusts. It's incredible how selfish prayer can be, but I'm certain of this, that selfish prayer ends up in utter dryness. What are the keys to spiritual life? I know there is none greater than the cross.

The heart that knows the path of the crucified one will flourish. Never, never reject the cross. Love your brethren.

And then it was told Job verse 19, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. There's no joy in David's part that this man had had a downfall. No joy that this man was dead and he'd won the war.

It was nothing, it was not victory. For him it was grief, because he lost and the victory that day was turned to mourning to all the people, for the people had say that they had say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gathered by stealth that day into the city, people being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle.

There is no victory when two members of the church fight. There's no victory. The only victory is when one dies for the other and ends the conflict.

The king covered his face and the king cried with a loud voice, oh my son Absalom, my son, my son. Joab came into the house to the king and said you have shamed this day the faces of all thy servants. That's the flesh speaking.

You've shamed your servants which this day have saved your life and the lives of your sons and of your daughters and the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. That's his rebuke, that's the rebuke of the flesh. You love your enemies and you hate us for you've declared this day that you regard neither princes nor servants for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day then it has pleased you well.

And I can imagine David saying it's true, you're right, I don't regard you Joab, I love you but I don't want to defend you or save you. I think David must have thought oh Joab if only you knew. Does God hate his friends? No, but it looks that way.

He gives his friends away as he gave his son. Did God hate Jesus on the cross? No, but it looked that way. Why are you doing this to me? Well you're my child, your life is expendable.

Why do I suffer like this? You're a child of God. God loves his enemies. We are like sheep for the slaughter all day while we killed all the day long.

There is a royal way of love. There is a royal path. It isn't got a red carpet.

It's got a, it's a road up to Calvary and it stays there. That's the path of the cross. The church is in the path of the cross.

We're in the way of the cross. The church has embraced it. We've seen it.

We're one. We're burning with love one for another but we've not become cliquish and indifferent to the strangers. We lay each other aside not fearing to offend each other so we may win the enemies of the Lord.

How terrible if we're so occupied with ourselves that we have no room for the stranger at the gate. All these things that people say evangelism, I believe, I believe in methods of evangelism. If you heard Keith Kelly at Birmingham it was wonderful to hear him, inspiring.

Great, but you know that none of those methods will ever work unless we embrace the cross. Methods are useful and God gives us grace to be open hearted and led of the spirit. Any method that will win people but it's love for the unlovely that will win us all.

They know that they're loved and they've got to know it. So has the whole church got to know it. People, you know, I can't get on with him.

We'll embrace the cross now, deeply. Don't linger on it. Don't examine it and turn it over and embrace the cross and go on.

You regard not princes or servants. If we'd all died, you love your enemies, you hate your friends. Oh Lord, what do you think of the church? I love everybody in the church of Jesus but I can't give them all away now.

And he tells her that Joab said you go and you tell the people something good otherwise you're going to lose this kingship. But he didn't. He bowed the hearts.

Verse 13, he said to Amithar, I'm making you a captain in the place of Joab. Incredible boldness. He said the captain of the enemy army is now my captain.

It's incredible boldness. He said you think this man is against me? And you've got all these icons and ideas about the people of God and playing off one against the other. The captain whom you think is my enemy can be my captain, my right hand.

And Joab who is defending me out. Didn't want the defense of a man like that. It's terrible you know that people defend people.

But they don't have the spirit of the person they're defending necessarily. Here's David saying no no, I'll have my enemy as my captain. And he did it.

In verse 14, he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah even as the heart of one man so that they sent this word to the king. Return now and all life. I think Joab thought what's going on here? It's a genius isn't it? My enemy be the first minister.

I can't think of an example from history but I've got loads of things I'm beginning to think of but I can't, my mind doesn't drop on one. When somebody is turned around and it's the table to turn and sort of reeking vengeance they say now we'll have the enemy will be the chief one. Tremendous isn't it? It is true that when you want to get peace in a situation that what you do is you say to the one who's, well you decide then.

Come on let's have it. That's how you decide. You do it.

Let's put it in that person's hands. I know it doesn't always work like that. Be idealistic about it but God loves his enemies.

He loves them. He really loves them. He doesn't hate his friends.

He just seems to occasionally. So we are a company of forgivers who have laid down our lives one for another. Isn't it wonderful? And laying down our lives for anyone we meet.

Praise the Lord. Jesus loved the church and gave himself, gave himself for it. That's the price of the church.

You could say that the price of the church but you know it's the price of love both in you and in those you minister to. Well there is no love, there is no currency of love outside of me. I can only use the currency that's in me.

Blood, heart, spirit, myself. Amen.

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