

A New Reformation

by Martyn-Lloyd Jones

Martyn-Lloyd Jones calls for a new reformation, emphasizing the need for a return to the Bible and a deep understanding of the Christian church and her message.

Duration: 59:32

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:41-43, Acts 2:47, 1 Peter 2:11-12

Topics: "New Reformation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the decline and fall of empires throughout history, drawing parallels to the current state of the country and the world. He highlights the dangers of living for pleasure and the importation of foreign workers to avoid menial tasks. The preacher argues that the only solution to this decline is the gospel, which is not only important for individual salvation but also for the collective well-being of nations. He urges people to consider the causes of moral declension and to recognize the need for righteousness and a return to God's teachings.

Transcript

The words to which I should like to call your attention this evening are to be found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, in the second chapter, reading from verse 41 to the end of the chapter. Now, those who worship here regularly on Sunday nights will know that we've been looking at this second chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles for a number of Sunday evenings, and that we are doing so for a very definite and special reason. We are concerned that the truth concerning the Christian church and her message should be known.

Now, why are we doing that? Well, we are doing that, again, not for any academic reason. I can assure you that my object in doing this Sunday by Sunday is no academic one. For every reason, it isn't an academic one.

I have only one reason for doing this, and that is that I am called of God to do it. And I am called of God, I believe, to do it, especially at this present time, not because one has an intellectual or theoretical or academic interest in these things, good though they are even from that standpoint, but rather for an intensely practical reason. And the practical reason is, of course, because of the whole state of the world and of men at this present time.

There's only one reason why any man should ever preach this gospel, and that is that he has a concern not only for his own soul, but for the souls of others. And never, surely, has this been more urgent than it is at this present time. The reason I say for doing this is because of the whole state of this country and the whole state, for that matter, of the entire world.

I needn't worry with reciting to you the sorry facts again, but surely anybody who has got eyes to see must be aware of what is happening round and about us, the moral declension. It's so obvious. Where is our knowledge of history? Haven't you read about great empires going down in the past? Do you know anything about the decline and the fall of the great Roman Empire? Have you considered the causes of that decline and fall? Can't you see that the thing that stands out there most clearly is that those people, after their great achievements, began to become dissolute, began to live for pleasure.

And perhaps the greatest characteristic of all was that they began to import people from other countries to do their most menial tasks for them, in order that they might not soil their hands, and in order that they might be at liberty to enjoy their pleasures. The writing is on the wall. And not only this country, I say, but the countries of the world.

Can anybody be complacent with the present position? And yet, side by side with these alarming portents, you see the masses of the people giving themselves over to pleasure, refusing to think, objecting to think, to thinking, and above everything else, refusing even to consider this gospel, this message at all. Now, this is the thing that concerns us. Why is it that the masses of the people are outside the Christian church and not even interested at all in the message of the Christian gospel and the Christian faith? And the answer is, quite plainly, because they are ignorant of what it really is.

They think they know what it is, and they reject it. But the truth is that they don't know what it really is. And what I'm trying to do is to put before you the true picture, the true picture of the church, the true picture of the Christian message.

Now, there is no doubt at all, it seems to me, that the great stumbling block that stands between men and women and listening to the Christian church and their messages, these false ideas, they look at the church and they say they don't want it. And there is a sense in which, unfortunately, I am compelled in common honesty to say that I can fully understand their position. They look at the church, they see this institution before them, and they say, what's that got to do with it? What's that got to do with life? How does that possibly help us in any way whatsoever? So they turn away impatiently from the church and they seek other ideas.

Now, what I'm trying to show you is that the thing against which they're reacting is not Christianity, it's not the church. It's something which is almost a travesty of the church. Now, there is before us, of course, a very great and obvious notable example of the very thing to which I'm referring.

Take the country of Russia. Russia has gone over to atheistic communism. Why did she do that? Why did Russia become communistic? Or if you like another example, why did France become atheistic at the end of the 18th century and the early 19th century? Why? And there's only one answer to the question.

Russia went over to atheistic communism simply in a violent reaction against the Russian Orthodox Church. There's no question about this. This is a sure fact of history.

They said, that's Christianity. And then they said, if that is Christianity, we want nothing at all to do with it. They lived under a system of oppression and of tyranny.

The poverty of the common people was indescribable. The court was allied with the Russian Orthodox Church and the man in control was that fiend called Rasputin. And the common people said, if this is Christianity, we don't want it.

So they turned right away from it. But you see what they were doing? They were not rejecting Christianity. They were rejecting nothing but a sheer travesty of Christianity and of the Christian church.

Now, it is because the same, I say, happened in the case of France at the time of the French Revolution. And the point I'm making is this, that in a lesser degree, but for the same ultimate reason, men and women today are disinterested, not interested in the Christian message and in the Christian church. Because they say, if what we see is Christianity, well then we want nothing at all to do with it.

Now, here it seems to me is the urgent question that is before us at this present time. And a great deal of attention and time are being given to this very matter. There are other voices which are saying exactly the same thing as I've said up until this very moment.

They say something's got to be done. The church has become ineffective. The church doesn't seem to be relevant anymore to the conditions and to the problems of men and women.

What's the matter? Now, here is the point of cleavage. As far as I've spoken, as I say, I'm saying almost exactly what is being said by certain notorious writers at the present time. What is sometimes referred to as the South Bank religion or theology and the teaching that comes from certain people in Cambridge.

You hear it on the television. The television, with the same instinct as the newspapers, always goes out for the novel and the curious and that which is somewhat revolutionary. These are the things that always get the publicity.

And therefore, this is the thing that is being heard by the masses of people in this country at the present time. Now, what do they say? Well, they start, as I say, by condemning things as they are. And there I'm with them 100%.

But from that point, I entirely descend from them, and this is why. What we need, according to these people, is what they call a new reformation. But the vital question is, what do you mean by reformation? I agree that you need reformation, but what is reformation? And all I'm trying to show in this series of sermons is that reformation doesn't mean scrapping the whole of the Bible and putting up your own ideas and theories.

It means the exact opposite. It means returning to the Bible. Now, if we're going to use the term reformation, let's be honest.

There was a great reformation in the 16th century. But what was that reformation? There have been other reformations. What were they? Well, every reformation that has ever happened in the life of the Church, and has led to new life and power and vigor in the Church, and a corresponding influence upon the lives of the people, every reformation has been a return to the New Testament.

Every one of them. And it is because I'm anxious to show that that is the only hope tonight, and in this present age, that I'm calling your attention to this whole subject. We mustn't scrap this and say, no, we are living in the 20th century, and of course, there's never been anybody like us before.

We've got the new learning. We are scientists. We are in the atomic age.

And what we need, of course, is an entirely new message. All together, scrap all you've got. Forget all the past.

It's all been wrong. We must start anew. That, it seems to me, is the very voice of the devil.

And the answer to that is that we must return to the New Testament. What we need is a reformation which is in line with all previous reformation. What we need is a restitution, a restoration of the original and of the primitive pattern.

And that, of course, is a learn to be found in the pages of the New Testament, and in particular, here in this book of the Acts of the Apostles. If you would like to know what Christianity is, listen, come with me. Let's go back to this book of the Acts of the Apostles.

What is the Christian church? What is the message? Well, I say you can only answer that question by coming back to this record. You see, this old world of ours, it's an old world, and it's got a long history. And if only modern people would read a little history, I think it would soon correct many of their foolish ideas and notions.

This idea that the problem of men is different today from what it's been in the past is, of all teachings, the most ludicrous that I'm aware of. Man different? Man is no different at all. Man is still exactly what he's always been.

As I've just reminded you, the problem of the Roman Empire in its decadent days was nothing but the problem of Great Britain tonight. Exactly the same. There's no difference.

Of course, it's expressed perhaps in a slightly different manner. They went about in chariots then. They go in aeroplanes now.

That's nothing. The question is, what did they go about? And when you come to analyze that, you find exactly the same thing. They had their feasts.

They were interested in diets, eating, drinking, dancing, sex. It's all there. Even the perversions, they knew all about it.

The world today is exactly what it was in the first century, in the days when our Lord came into it, and when the Apostle Paul and these other apostles were here. It's exactly the same. Same decadence.

Same immorality. Same vice. Same hopelessness.

Same fear. Everything the same. And the only thing that has ever done any good in this world has been this message.

You see, we read in this book of the Acts of the Apostles that the members of the early church, and the preachers particularly, were referred to as these men who were turning the world upside down. There was

nothing that made such an impact upon the Roman Empire as the Christian church. They were very able people.

The Greeks had their great philosophers, and remember, they'd all lived, and had flourished, and had died before the Lord Jesus Christ was ever born. The best teaching had already been given. Not only that, the Romans, they were the experts in the art of government.

There have never been better experts in the art of government, and particularly local government, than the Romans. We know that the legal system of practically every country in the world, apart from our own, is based upon Roman law. And even in our case, it has its place.

But they were famous for law, for order, for government. And they did everything they could to organize society, and to improve the lot of men and women, and to establish some kind of utopia. Those ancients were very interested in utopia.

But they failed completely. The only power that has ever dealt with the condition of the problem of men in sin has been this gospel. I was trying to tell you last Sunday night how, as the apostle puts it in his first epistle to the Corinthians in chapter 6, this is the only message that can come to men who are adulterers, effeminate abusers of themselves with mankind, and thieves and murderers.

There is no other power under heaven that can deal with such men, and lift them up, and wash them, and cleanse them, and make new men of them. But this gospel, and it is the only thing that can do it tonight. And that is why I say there is nothing more urgently important than that we should know what the church is, and what her message is.

And here it is. Look at it. Suddenly there appeared this thing, this phenomenon in the old world called the Christian church.

And here is the first account of it. They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. Here they are.

This is it. This is the Christian church. You see, it all comes out of the tremendous thing that happened on the day of Pentecost.

These apostles who had been with Christ, you remember, were met together in prayer in a room, and others with them. Suddenly the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. It wasn't anything they did.

It wasn't their organizing. It wasn't that they decided months before to have a great campaign, and set up numerous subcommittees, and planning how to do it. Not at all.

In their utter helplessness and weakness, they were just praying and waiting. And down came this tremendous power, and they began to speak with authority. Three thousand men were saved in that one sermon.

This is it. And they were added to the company. That's the church.

And what do we know about the church? Well, I've been holding it before you. The first thing we are told is that these people continued steadfastly together. They came together.

What for? Well, we've already considered the first thing, the apostles' teaching. We've told you what it is. We've told you why they wanted it.

Now look at this next thing, which is also important and vital for us. The fellowship. They continued steadfastly in the fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.

Now, it's this fellowship that I want to talk about tonight. And I'm doing so because I want to give you a picture of what the Christian church is, what a Christian society is. Because this is the only thing that has any hope to offer to the world tonight.

You're reading your newspapers. Do you get any hope there? All right. Be interested in politics.

Can you solve the moral problems there? You can solve the industrial ones, perhaps. But you know, you may not even solve your industrial problems if you don't solve your moral problems. If everybody is going to go on working less and less, and have more and more money for doing less and less, you won't even solve your industrial problem.

That's how Rome went down. They all wanted to spend their time in their baths. And of course, if you were very wealthy, you had a golden bath.

And so it went, you see, all these steps and stages. It's the same tonight. Must have more beer, must have more wine, more cigarettes, more cigars.

You see, the quality and the brand is nothing. The rank is but the guinea stamp. The men's a men for all that.

Quite so. But that's how the Roman Empire went down. And that's how I say every empire has gone down.

That's how this country will go down. There's only one way of arresting all this, and this is this gospel. I'm not preaching because I'm here as a kind of agent of the government.

I'm here, my friends, because I'm concerned about your individual soul. But I'm also showing you at the same time that this is not only true of the individual, it's true collectively. There is no hope apart from this.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. It is righteousness that exalteth a nation. You can't live on anything else.

But now, unfortunately, you see, this false idea is current as to what the church is and what she's meant to be doing. But here is the true picture, this fellowship. What is fellowship? I'm told about these people who have been living a life of sin and had rejected Christ and had said away with him, crucify him, but who suddenly are convinced and convicted by the preaching of Peter, and 3,000 of them are added to the church, and here they are going day by day to this company, to this fellowship, to hear the teaching.

But what is fellowship? There's no word that is more abused at the present time, it seems to me, than this word fellowship. It's the great word today. It's the great word in connection with what is called the ecumenical movement.

They, as I have been showing you, are not interested in the teaching, in the doctrine at all. They say doctrine divides, therefore don't talk about it, we don't need it, but what we need is fellowship. What is fellowship? Well, there are some strange notions current with regard to what constitutes fellowship.

Fellowship means, as I'm going to show you, a very deep unity, and there is all the difference in the world between true unity and a coalition. That's one of the greatest fallacies of all, that when you get a coalition you've got unity, you haven't. The history of every coalition that's ever been politically proves that there was never any true unity.

It's a temporary coming together, that's not fellowship. You can persuade yourself it is, but it's all on the surface. Deep down there is disunity, there is division.

But this is the tragedy today, that people say, oh, it doesn't matter what people believe as long as we all come together. Roman Protestantism, oh, it doesn't matter, we're all one, let's all be together. Perhaps even all of the various religions of the world, let's have a great world congress, let's amalgamate all religions.

And the world laughs at it, and I think for once the world is right. That's not Christianity, that's not fellowship, and that's not unity. But people's ideas as to what constitutes fellowship can be really quite pathetic.

Some people think of fellowship in purely social terms. Oh, there's been a great deal of this in the church, and I'm here to ridicule it, because it's got nothing to do with Christianity. People think that fellowship just means sometimes having a cup of tea together, or having some biscuits or a bun and a cup of tea, but that's fellowship.

They use the term with respect to that. But my dear friends, that's not fellowship. Others I've known think of fellowship in these terms.

In certain countries, which I needn't mention, this happens almost invariably at the end of a service. The minister says, no, you must all have fellowship with one another. So he then exhorts them and teaches them what to do.

He tells them all to get up and to shake hands with the person sitting next to them on the right, and they all shake hands. Marvelous fellowship. Those are the ideas of fellowship.

A superficial friendliness, a niceness, a joviality. That's how this great word fellowship has become degraded. I remember a man once telling me, he was an evangelical preacher, he said, you know, I find I have no fellowship.

And he mentioned a certain man who's not an evangelical at all, but quite a notorious liberal. He said, you know, I find I have more fellowship with him than I do with many evangelicals. Well, I said, it all depends upon what you mean by fellowship.

I said, if you mean that he's a nicer man, a nicer fellow than many evangelicals, I agree with you, but that's not fellowship. That a man is pleasant and affable and kind doesn't mean you can have fellowship with him. You can pass the time of day with him, there'll be no disputes and quarrels perhaps, but my dear friends, that isn't fellowship.

What is this? Well, I say again, it isn't institutionalism. And this is the thing, it seems to me, that is keeping so many outside the Christian church at the present time. They look at what they see, and they see nothing but a great institution, a great organization.

It's not only true of Roman Catholicism, but it's true of Protestantism in this country today. I'm simply asking you this question. Look at the modern church, the modern Roman Catholic church, if you like, or the modern Protestant church in this country.

Can you see it in the book of the Acts of the Apostles? Can you see anybody corresponding to the Pope? Can you have fellowship with the Pope? Look at the ceremonial and the etiquette you have to go through before you can even see him. And look at people looking at him in the distance, and going along and considering it an honor just to kiss a ring on his finger, or something. Is that fellowship? My friends, that's why people are outside the church.

That's why they're not listening to Christianity. They look at that, and they say they don't want it. Well, I'm here to say that I don't want it.

That's not Christianity. Here we have a fellowship, I say. It isn't a mere institution that all and sundry can use.

Let me say it in the name of God. I'm getting rather tired of these statesmen and others who never darken the doors of a place of worship while they're alive, but who want Christian hymns at their funerals. I protest in the name of God.

They say that we are hypocrites. Isn't that sheer hypocrisy? What do they want Christian hymns for in their burials? Why don't they come and sing them when they're alive? That's hypocrisy. And the church is foolish enough to allow herself to be used, but that's not New Testament Christianity.

No, no, what you've got here is true fellowship. What does it mean? Well, I've turned up the word for you. It means this.

It means a deep association. It means a true communion. It means a close relationship of which the highest example is marriage.

It's a word that is sometimes used to denote partnership in business. It's not just meeting occasionally in a church building, just shaking hands at the end and going, well, that's not a church. There's no fellowship involved in that.

It's never anything superficial. It is deep. It's vital.

It becomes the main thing in the life. It's as it was here. You see, it's more like a family.

And when people become Christians, they become one. They have this community. They're in a family together.

They're united by certain bonds that are indissoluble. Now, our Lord himself put this very plainly on one occasion. He'd been speaking, and speaking particularly about the case of the rich young ruler.

And the rich young ruler went away, sorrowful, couldn't submit to our Lord's demand. And Jesus looking upon them says, with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lends for my sake and the gospel's. But he shall receive

a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lends with persecution, and in the world to come eternal life. That's it.

If you leave a human father or mother for my sakes as Christ, it's all right. You'll have fathers and mothers, hundredfold in this present life. You'll have a new family.

This is what is meant by fellowship. And this is the only truth about the Christian church. I say again, isn't it time that we got back to this primitive pattern? Here is Christianity as it begins in the ancient world, this power, this church, this message that turns the world upside down.

And this has been repeated. You see, the story of the church is a most extraordinary one. I've often said from this pulpit that I know of nothing more instructive next to the Bible than church history.

I know nothing more encouraging, nothing more exhilarating. What do you think the story of the church is? Do you think that it's a story that it begins here in infancy and gradually goes on developing, and up, and up, and up? That isn't it at all. The story of the church is a story of ups and downs.

The church, because men and women forget the primitive pattern, becomes a mere institution, and she becomes dead. She may become very wealthy. She may become very powerful politically.

The popes were tremendously powerful in the middle ages, but you know that's got nothing to do with the church. And how is there a Christian church at all tonight? There's only one answer. It is because God in his mercy has looked down and has revived the church, and has made her come back to the primitive pattern.

This is true reformation. If you want to know what the church is, well, here it is. Look at these people.

They meet together every day to listen to the apostles' doctrine, to have fellowship with them, to break bread with them, to pray with them. There it is, and this thing begins to spread, and people are amazed. There's a dynamic, there's a power, there's something living.

And people say, what is this? I wish I could have it. That's Christianity. Then you remember the story, have you ever read the story of the church that used to meet in the catacombs in Rome? They were so persecuted they couldn't meet anywhere else, but they met together in those burial places underground, in what is called the catacombs.

These little people, quite an important people, there were no great people amongst them except very exceptionally, but they met together, and there they engaged in this fellowship, and the power spread. And you know, this is the great story of the church. Oh, my dear friend, I have to ask you, alas, in the name of God, don't look at things as you see them today.

Look back to this great history, and then you'll see what a church is, what the church is. There it is in the catacombs. But even in those dark Middle Ages, when Rome in a pomp and power, Pope was a great prince, and he could manipulate kings and so on, you say, that's the church.

I say, no, it's not the church. That's the great heart. That's the devil's counterfeit.

It's got nothing to do with Christianity. Where was the church? Well, the church was to be found amongst a very simple little people in the north of Italy, people known as the Waldensians. They met together in one another's houses.

Sometimes they were not even allowed to do that. They'd meet in caves, way up in the hills and in the mountains. But they met together, the little groups, that's the church.

Or the followers of John Huss in what is now called Czechoslovakia, same thing. The followers of John Wycliffe in this country, all this well before the Protestant Reformation. My friends, that's the church, not the great institution, but these little people believing the truth, knowing the Lord, having lives changed, holding on to the teachings, praying together.

And then you come to the actual Protestant Reformation itself. And immediately you find the same thing. They met together in these little companies, exactly in the same way.

Come along down the centuries, you get it in the Puritans. You get it in that wonderful story of the Scottish Covenanters. Read these things, my friends, and you'll see what the church is, what Christianity is.

Generally, almost, they would have to meet way up in the mountains somewhere. I remember once visiting a place called Communion Stones in the south of Scotland, not far from Dumfries. One of the most thrilling places to visit, I think, I've ever known.

You had to go off the main roads, up the secondary roads, and you came to a farm lane, and you landed in a farmyard. And then you had to walk up the side of a hill. And then there was a little break in the hills, and you just went round the corner, and there you saw a kind of natural meeting place, almost a little amphitheater.

And there were big stones. What did it mean? Well, it meant this, that the Christian people in the 17th century used to meet together up there on Sunday afternoons, and they'd have a communion service. And a man or two would be firsted in this break, this gap in the hills, to see if the soldiers, the British, the English soldiers, were coming to arrest them.

Were they? Oh, they were little unknown people, but they got the grace of God in their hearts. They knew this teaching. Their lives were transformed, and they were ready to meet their God.

They were risking life and limb. That's the church. Not some grand institution, but men and women who are brought together in fellowship.

It's the same with the early Methodists. Well, no, what I'm holding before you is this, that this is the picture of the church. This is what is meant by fellowship.

And according to the New Testament, one of the best tests we can ever apply to ourselves to know whether we are Christians or not is just this test of fellowship. The apostle John puts it like this in his first epistle, in the third chapter, in verse 14. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.

Now, there it is. Would you like to know whether you're a Christian? Oh, that's the most important thing you can ever know. A man can't live truly unless he's a Christian.

He certainly can't die truly unless he's a Christian. How do you face death? How do you face eternity? How do you face the possibilities of war? How do you live in this evil world? It can't be done, except a man's a Christian. How do you know whether you're a Christian? Here's the answer.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. What's he mean? Oh, you like this fellowship. See, the moment these 3,000 were converted, they joined the fellowship and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and in the fellowship.

Day after day after day, nothing could keep them away. Why? Oh, this was the one thing they wanted. It had become the biggest and the deepest things in their lives.

It had become more important to them even than their sweetest earthly human ties. When a man becomes a Christian, he wants to meet with other Christians. This is the proof of Christianity, that it changes a man.

It gives him a new birth. He belongs to a new family. It's deeper than natural ties, than social ties, than national ties.

Love the brethren. They're drawn together. They can't keep apart from one another.

If you want to know for certain whether you're a Christian at this moment in this congregation, I can give you the test. Would you sooner spend this evening with the humblest Christians in this country rather than with the greatest in the land who are not Christians? That's the test. It is as simple as that.

It isn't ultimately a test of what you believe with your mind. We can believe things with our minds without their affecting our hearts and our wills. Here's the thorough test.

Love of the brethren. That you feel something about the humblest and the lowliest because they're Christian, which you never feel about the greatest and the most exalted if they're not Christian. And you prefer them, you desire to be with them, and to spend all your time with them.

That you become concerned about them. Did you notice this? And all that believed were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need. Some people think that that's a sort of primitive communism, but it isn't.

It's a misunderstanding of what the text really says. What it means is this. Not that they all sold everything and put it into a common pool.

It wasn't that. What it does say in the original meaning is this. That they so loved one another that none of them was allowed to suffer.

And if one of them was in a condition of penury, the other who had a superabundance was prepared to sell some of his possessions and goods in order to help his weaker brother. In other words, though they still held on to their possessions, they said this. We are all prepared to live for one another as the need arises.

That's what it means. And it is always a test of the Christian. As a man is prepared to do something for a member of his own family who is in trouble, so the Christian is prepared to do that for another Christian who is his brother in Christ.

There is a oneness. There is a unity. And this is the test.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. What is it that makes this fellowship possible? Well, it seems to me that there are three main matters. I'm just going to note them.

What makes this possible, of course, is identity of nature. This is the result of the new birth. You don't argue about these things, you know them.

The apostle Paul, in his second epistle to the Corinthians, puts it like this. He says, don't be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Why? He says, well, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? It's as simple as that.

There can be no fellowship, no real community of interest between righteousness and unrighteousness. It's impossible. Or listen, he goes on, what communion, the same word, hath light with darkness? It's impossible.

You cannot mix light with darkness. What conquereth Christ with Belial, what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? None at all is the answer. For ye are the temple of the living God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Now then, there is the first thing that makes fellowship, that we have the same nature within us. We are sharers of the same life. And the moment you detect it in another, you have fellowship with that person.

This is the most wonderful thing, I think, in many ways in the whole world. It's been my privilege as minister in this place for nearly 27 years to have so many experiences of this, particularly during the war. I still get it, thank God, but it was very wonderful during the war.

There were troops, you remember, in this country. Oh, they came from Canada, they came from America, they came from Holland, they came from Norway, they came from almost every part of the world, here they were for a while in London, and they'd come to the service, and at the end of the service they'd come in to me. I'd never seen them before, but you know, I knew them, I knew them, and they knew me.

We'd never seen one another before, we'd never spoken before. But you recognize a brother, you know at once, you belong together, immediately. Doesn't matter what the color is, doesn't matter what the clothing is, nothing matters, you know at once you're speaking the same language.

You're a brother and you're having fellowship, it's instinctive. That's how it begins, but it doesn't stop there. Then this common teaching, you see, this is the thing that produces fellowship.

The Apostle Jude talks about the common salvation, and he's right, there's only one salvation, and it's the common salvation. I've had people from the South Sea Islands in that vestry of mine at the end of a service, but we knew at once that we were brethren, why, well, we were sharing the same salvation. We'd got a fundamental agreement about basic things.

We don't agree about everything, but we agree about fundamental things. We agree about God, we agree about ourselves in sin, we agree about the blessed Savior, we agree about the new life, we are one, and we know one another, the same teaching. A fundamental agreement, you can't have fellowship with a man unless you've got a fundamental agreement with him.

It's impossible, there's no need to argue, you just can't have it, you're speaking different languages. But here you speak the same language, and then the other thing I would emphasize is a sense of trust and of freedom. If there's any doubt you don't have fellowship, there must be mutual trust and understandings that you can speak freely, you can open your heart and the other person does exactly the same, and

you're enjoying fellowship, there's freedom, there's an exchange going on, it's wonderful, it's like a family at its very best, that's fellowship.

Now then, those are the basis of fellowship, and they work themselves out like this. They came, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and in the fellowship, why? Well, as I say, they had the same outlook and the same interests. To these people, the thing that had become important now was this new life which they'd received.

The day before, no, no, it was something else. The day before, they may have been interested in a thousand and one questions. Possibly these people as Jews, as most of them were at the beginning, they were most interested in, well, perhaps political questions.

Nothing wrong in that, but I say that was their main interest. How to get rid of the Roman yoke, how to get rid of their injustices, all right, I am not arguing against that, go on, you can still, and indeed it's your duty to be interested in politics. God has ordained government to keep evil and sin within bounds in this evil world.

You must be interested, but that isn't the main thing. It isn't the main interest of the Christian. What is it? Oh, it's this new life.

And this is why they came together to the fellowship. They wanted to know more and more about it. They'd never had it until that day, and now they've got it.

They said, this is the most wonderful thing. It's changed everything, and so having this similarity of applicant of interest, they came amongst these people. Why? Well, because they had become aware of certain things together.

What were they? Now, I read to you that second chapter of Peter's first epistle at the beginning because I think in many ways it's one of the best summaries of this matter in the whole of the New Testament, the same Peter who preached on the day of Pentecost. You see, he writes about it and this is how he puts it. Dearly beloved, he says, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having you a conversation honest among the Gentiles, whereas they speak evil against you as against evil doers, they may glorify God on your behalf on the day of visitation.

What's he mean? Well, he says, look here, because you are Christians, you know that you are strangers and pilgrims in this world. And it is one of the first things that the Christian realizes. The great ambition of everybody else in the world is to settle down in this world.

This is the only world, they say, and the thing to do is to make the best of this. Don't think of death, they say, it'll come soon enough. Don't worry about these things, live for the hour, have a good time.

And the first thing that happens to a man when he becomes a Christian is that he realizes that he's nothing but a stranger and a pilgrim in this world. He's only a journeyman, he's only just passing through it, and he says, I mustn't therefore give myself to it, because this vanity fair, which I'm giving myself to, it'll be gone tomorrow, and I'll be gone. What then? No, no, these people realize they've got a soul within them, and that they're merely passing through this world, they say, with Paul in writing to the citizenship, is in heaven.

The Christian's whole outlook on this world and its life is absolutely changed and revolutionized. He lived for it, he was of it, he's no longer, he's been separated. Peter keeps on using these great phrases, you were a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an early nation, a peculiar people, that you should show

forth his praises, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

You were in the dark, and you had friendships and fellowship, as it were, with the people in the dark, that you've been brought out into the light, and you want the people of the light. You realize that you're a new man, that you don't belong to this darkness any longer, you're in a new realm, you've been called out of darkness, or he puts it again, who were not a people, but are now the people of God. You were just a rebel, irresponsible, not understanding, not knowing, living like animals, but you've been brought out of that, and naturally people are aware of this, they come together, they belong together, you can't live there, it's impossible.

That doesn't mean you're perfect, it doesn't mean that you may not occasionally fall into sin, but you don't live there. You no longer belong to the darkness, you belong to the light, and they wanted the fellowship of those who belong to the light. You can't live in a no-man's land spiritually, you're one or the other, and you know which it is, and if you've got life of God in you, you'll want to meet people who've got it also.

Because you've been brought out of the darkness into his marvelous light, but that's the negative, and I don't want to leave you on a negative, let me put that in its positive dress, in its positive form. Oh, these people met together not only because they no longer belong to the darkness, they came together because they realized the dignity and the value of their new life. Listen, you are a chosen generation, a kingdom of priests, a royal kingdom.

You are an holy nation, you are a people for God's own peculiar possession. That's what you are, that's what you've become as the result of your new birth, as the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit upon you. You've got new life in you, and it's the royal life.

You've got the life of God in your soul, you're a child of God, you belong to the household of God, you're a member of the royal family. And realizing that you want to belong and spend your time with the members of the royal family, you've got a sense of dignity about you that you never had before. And you don't take this great name and this great family that you now belong to into the realms of darkness.

No, no, you've been promoted, you've been honored, you realize who you are, and you want to be with the like people. You know there's a difference, and you can't demean it, you can't disgrace it, and you don't want to spend your time where you used to be. You want to be in this other realm for its purity, its glory, its wonder, and its unusual honor.

That's how Peter put it. That's how he writes to unknown Christian people. And then the last thing he mentions is this.

Why have you been made all this? Why are you a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people? He gives the answer, that he may show forth his presence, his excellency, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. This is most important. Why am I preaching about the church, I say? Why am I anxious we should have this true idea of the church and of the Christian message? My dear friends, this is my ultimate answer.

The glory of God and the souls of men and women. As I put it to you at the beginning, I am here to tell you about God, and I'm here to tell you about God because I know you've got that soul within you which you've not known about and which you've ignored and neglected. I can see you living to this present evil world and to darkness and to sin, and I know that if you die like that, you'll go on spending eternity like that, only

that the misery will be much greater than it is now, and the suffering and the realization of your folly when there's no time to change and you can do nothing about it.

That's why I preach. And I want to tell you about another life. I want to tell you that you can be made a son of God, a child of God.

You can become a member of this chosen generation. You can become one of the priests in this kingdom. You can become a member of this holy nation.

You can become a person who becomes the special object of God's care and love. He'll count the very hairs of your head. He'll give you a new life, new power, new strength.

This is possible to you, and you'll die as a noble man, and you'll enter into your eternal inheritance. I want to tell you about that. So did all these people, and that was one of the main reasons why they kept up this constant attendance in this fellowship.

They said, this marvelous thing has happened to us. What about our relatives? What about our friends? What about our neighbors? They don't know. I want to tell them about it, but I'm ignorant.

I must learn. I want to listen to this apostolic teaching. I must spend my time with these people.

I want to ask questions. I find I've gone wrong in certain respects. I want help and advice, and they need it, and I can help them.

I must be with them in order that I may be a perfect witness, in order that I may show forth, tell forth his praises, who hath called me out of darkness into his most marvelous light. These were the things that made them continue steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship. They said, we are one.

We are brothers. We are partners. We are God's emissaries, God's agents.

The world is miserable. It's unhappy. It's dying in sin, and men and women are defeated, and they don't know about this.

Let's show them. Let's demonstrate to them that there's another type of life. And so they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and teaching and fellowship, in order that they might perfect themselves in this very respect.

They were doing, you see, what the apostle Paul exhorts the Philippians to do, and this is my final word to you this evening. This is what God, I think, is calling upon us at this time to do in this country. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, in the heavens, holding forth the word of life.

That's why these people continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and in the fellowship, not only of the apostles, but of all these others who'd had this great same experience of life from God coming into their souls. They said, we are like lights in the heaven, and we must shine brightly. Men and women in darkness, they're dying at our side.

They don't know where they are nor where they're going. They think they know all, but they're ignorant. They can't live, they can't die.

Let's show them. Let's show them together, that's the church, not some pompous institution which is ever ready to sell itself to great men. No, no, it's simple, it's unknown people, but they're the people of God.

And their desire is not to be men-pleasers, not to be court chaplains, as it were, but they want to show forth his praises, who have pulled them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Is this true of you, my friend? Do you delight in this sort of fellowship? Are you here tonight because you want to know more of these things? Are you worried and troubled that perhaps you've been missing some wonderful program on the television while you've been here? Is that it? These are the things that tell us whether we are Christians or not. What comes first? What are we living for? What are we relying on? How do we face life? How are we going to face death? How are we going to God? These are the questions.

And when these become the supreme questions, this is the thing that obviously comes first, ever always. What else matters? Are you burdened about the state of this country? Are you just annoyed at the increase in sin? Or tell me, have you got any sorrow in your heart for poor men and women who are victims of this? Are you just annoyed with these poor young people, or do you feel sorry for them? They don't know any better. They know all about God and Christ, and the possibility of being sons of God.

Are you just annoyed and irritated, or does your heart bleed for them? Do you want to show them this marvelous light? Do you want to hold before them the word of life? This is the thing that makes people come together in fellowship, in order that we may shine the more brightly, and show to this evil generation to which we belong, that there is a way of which they know nothing. The way of God, the way of Christ, the way of the life of God in the soul, the way of eternal salvation. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the breath.

Is the Bible the most important book in the world for you? Is this society the most important society in the world for you? Do the children of God come first with you, before everybody? It doesn't matter who they are. May God give us honesty as we examine ourselves. That's Christianity.

That is the church. That is the life, which is life indeed. That's the way to live.

It's the only teaching which can prepare us how to die gloriously. It's the teaching that introduces us to the everlasting and eternal inheritance that awaits the children of God. Do you belong to the fellowship? Are you in it? Do you know it? If you do, thank God.

If you don't, go and tell him. Tell him you feel you're outside. Tell him you don't understand these things, that they're strange to you.

Tell him that you'd like to know. Ask him to enlighten you with his spirit, and he will. If you're honest, if you really want it, you ask him, and he'll give it to you.

And once you've got this life, oh, then you'll love the brethren, and you'll covet the fellowship above everything else on earth. Amen.

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