

(A Solid Grip on the Christian Life) The Body of Christ

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of unity and functioning as the body of Christ. It highlights the authority and power that comes when believers gather in agreement, the need to start with small acts of service and encouragement, and the significance of demonstrating the love of God to those around us. The sermon encourages believers to embrace their unique gifts, avoid comparison or competition, and focus on building unity and encouraging one another.

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Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Matthew 18:19, Matthew 18:18, 1 Corinthians 12:7, Acts 1:1, Luke 10:1, Ephesians 3:2, Colossians 3:10, John 3:16

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Description

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Transcript

So if you've been following along in the last five weeks, we've been talking about having a solid grip on the Christian life so that it doesn't slip, or in other words, that we don't backslide. And we began with considering the hand, with the palm symbolizing our knowing God as our Father, personally, not just theoretically because the Bible says that, but intimately. And then we thought about knowing the effectiveness of the blood of Christ in not only cleansing us, but declaring us righteous before God.

If we have really repented of our sin, a lot of people claim the blood of Christ to have not repented of their sin. They're fooling themselves that they are cleansed. They can live all their life thinking they're cleansed and wake up at the judgment seat of Christ and discover they're not cleansed.

So repentance is essential before we come to the blood of Christ. Then we thought of the living Word of God, which is different from just reading the printed Word. Man should live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and God's words are proceeding from his mouth all the time.

And we have to live by that. And that is the message of the first chapter of the Bible, where every day God speaks. And he's been speaking ever since, from that time onwards.

So if we hear and respond and obey, we live. Otherwise we don't live. Anything which we call life, which is less than living by every word of God, is not really life.

Then we talked about the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which is distinct from the way people were filled with the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. So the Holy Spirit is upon people. From the day of Pentecost onwards, the Holy Spirit comes within.

And from the innermost being, rivers of living water will flow out to bless others. The whole purpose of being filled with the Spirit is first an inner cleansing. That's why it starts from the innermost being, and then going out to being witnesses to other people in a way that blesses them.

And then last Sunday, we thought about the way of the cross. We saw that the one thing that Jesus did every single day of his life, which is written in Scripture, was that he took up the cross. He died to self.

That means he died to doing his own will. That's the one thing we know he definitely did. A lot of other things we don't know, but one thing we know that every single day, he did deliberately sought the Father's will, and he did not do his own will.

John 6 38 says that's the reason why he came down from heaven. And all of these, you find that Christendom speaks about these things. But I would say the vast majority of born-again Christians that I've met, they don't really find security in God as their Father.

One proof of it is they get anxious and worried about so many things. That is the clearest proof that they don't know God as their Father. They know him theoretically.

It's like having a father who lives 10,000 miles away, who once in a while contacts me, but he can't help me when I'm a problem right now. So that's the way they know him as their Father. And many who speak about the blood of Christ don't know that through that blood I can be completely declared righteous before God.

In the same way, many who read the Bible regularly do never hear the word from God's mouth. In the same way about the Holy Spirit, many who speak about the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it doesn't seem to cleanse their insides. It just produces a lot of excitement.

That's not Holy Spirit. It's an unholy spirit that leaves you unclean inside. I cannot imagine how anybody says they're filled with the Holy H-O-L-Y Spirit and remain unclean inside.

They're filled with something else. I'm just mentioning this, the amount of deception there is in these areas in Christendom. And same way, the Way of the Cross.

Hardly anybody speaks about the Way of the Cross, and even fewer people sort of seek to go that way. But Jesus said that the way to life would be narrow, and very few would find it. So I'm not surprised.

Very few find it. That's really true. So finally, the last of these six is the body of Christ.

All these things in one sense were unknown in the Old Covenant. In the Old Covenant, nobody knew God as Father. They only knew Him as God.

And you find that even today in most places when people pray, they pray, Oh God, Oh Lord. There's nothing wrong in that. He is God.

He is Lord. But I found that even in the villages in India, they've been taught to pray Lord. Well, I do pray sometimes Lord, but most of the time I pray Father.

In fact, in my private prayer, I say Dad, because that's the real meaning of Abba. It has brought me to an intimate relationship with God. It's very, very important.

And you must see that that's the way it works in our life. And so we find that Christendom has gone astray in all these areas. They don't know God as Father.

They don't know the power of the blood of Christ because, for example, they live with condemnation. They live with discouragement, thinking about their past failures. Means they don't know the power of the blood of Christ.

And like I said about the Living Word of God, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and the Word of the Cross. All these were not known in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, there was no, there was a constant memory, it says, of sins committed in the past.

That's gone now with the blood of Christ. In the Old Testament, they could not hear the Living Word of God. Only the prophets could hear.

Imagine that we have the privilege, as the prophets had, to hear God speak directly to us. In the same way, there was no fullness of the Holy Spirit from within in the Old Covenant. And the Way of the Cross was completely unknown in the Old Covenant.

So all these five that I mentioned are New Covenant experiences, not Old Covenant. And the same way with the body of Christ. In the Old Covenant, there was no such thing as two people becoming one.

Body means, the beginning of a human body, is when two different individual units become one inside a mother's womb. They are different, but they become one. That's the beginning of a body.

It may be very small, but it's the beginning of their body. If they don't get united, there is no body. It's only when a union takes place between those two dissimilar units inside a mother's womb, that they become one.

And that's a picture of how the body of Christ begins. Two people becoming one. That was impossible in the Old Covenant.

And that's why God never even attempted to send two prophets together into Israel at any time. Right from the beginning, Noah, he was one man. I mean, that would be confusion.

I don't think Ark would ever have been built if there was another man. They'd be always discussing and disagreeing. In the same way, all the prophets in the Old Covenant, Moses.

The only reason God gave Aaron was because Moses said, I can't speak. But Israel was led by one man, Moses. And when Moses went away for 30 days, Aaron led them all into idolatry.

It was one man that saved Israel. It was one man that saved the world in Noah's time. It was one man that led Israel out of Egypt.

And it was one man, Joshua, who led them into Canaan. And right through the Old Testament, you find all the prophets. Samuel was a prophet.

One single person. Elijah. Elisha.

You find him never working with another person. Or Jeremiah. Or all these prophets that you read in the Old Testament.

Now, there were prophets in Jeremiah's time. Even prophetesses like Huldah. And probably Zephaniah and Habakkuk were around that time.

But why is it God did not allow these two prophets to work together? I think I know. Because they'd have fought with each other. It would have been a very bad testimony in Israel if two prophets both fought with each other.

So God kept them separate probably in different parts of the country. And it all changed when Jesus came. Just before Jesus came, we got rid of Haggai and Zechariah.

But I don't think they were actually working together. One was a much older man. And he prophesied.

And then Zechariah continued. So it was around the same period of time. They were not working together.

But the moment Jesus came, we read that He sent out His disciples two by two. He never sent any of His disciples alone. He chose 70 of them, we read.

And we read about that in Luke chapter... this is the beginning, really. In Luke's Gospel in chapter 10, in verse 1, the Lord appointed 70 others. And He sent them two by two.

This is the first time we find the Lord sending more than one person. And He was preparing the way for people working together. And when we look around at Christendom and see how difficult it is for two people to work together, you can see how even this whole principle of the body is not even manifest today.

But Jesus sent them out as soon as He was there. He sent them in pairs into every place where He Himself was going to come. And that's what He's doing today.

He's sending people out two by two to every place where He was going to come. And once you come to the Acts of the Apostles, in Acts chapter 2, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. And what happened was that the Lord took these 120 and through the baptism the Holy Spirit made them one.

That was the beginning of the body of Christ in Acts chapter 2. And then you read in chapter 3, Peter and John, you see them going together. Now the interesting thing which if you read the Gospels is that Peter and John were completely different in their temperament. John was the more introverted, meditative type of person and Peter was the fiery, choleric man.

And God put these two opposites together. God has a wonderful way of bringing people who are dissimilar but who love Jesus and making them work together. Because the glory of God, we read in John 14, was seen in Jesus Christ full of grace and truth.

Now it's very, very difficult, I found through the years, for one single person to manifest the grace and truth and balance. Usually we are all imbalanced slightly this way or that way. I mean, if you're over a period of maturity, over 30, 40, 50 years, that balance may come.

But initially, when we go out to serve, there's an imbalance. The Bible says in Romans 11 22, behold the goodness and the severity of God. God is good and God is severe.

And it's very difficult to find a servant of the Lord who's got that in balance. Jesus had it in perfect balance. He could put his hand around the lepers and he could comfort adulterous women and forgive them, but he would also take a whip and chase people out of the temple.

That's the balance between grace and truth. But it's rarely found in people at the beginning of their Christian life. Usually we're imbalanced.

Even in a marriage, a balanced marriage would be one where the father and mother together manifest grace and truth, but one is strict and one is kind. It's not that the other is not kind, but that balance is usually found in two dissimilar people coming together. So if you find that your marriage partner is the opposite of yours, it's a pretty good indication that that may be the will of God, because he brings people together who are dissimilar.

And it's a foolish husband or wife who tries to change the partner to become like them. There's some foolish, I would say idiotic, wives who try to change their husbands to be like them, or husbands who try to change their wives to be like them. It's not what God intended.

Peter never tried to make John like him. John didn't try to make Peter like him. It's fantastic conceit, arrogance, to think that everybody in the body of Christ must be like me.

What rubbish! Or that everybody should have my gift. That's arrogance. God has made people different.

And that the Bible says that in 1 Corinthians 12, one is the hand, and one is the foot, and one is the ear, one is the eye. And what will the body be like if it's one big eye? So we must recognize, you can know that you've understood a little bit of the body of Christ, if you can accept, accept others who are different from you, but who love Jesus as much as you or perhaps more than you. They may be different.

So this is the balance that the Lord seeks to bring in right from the beginning when he's an issue, when he's planting a church. And I see the picture of that of Jesus stretching out his arms on the cross. I believe he was inviting the fanatic Jews who thought everybody else in the world was bad, only they were good.

And the opposite of the Jews were the Gentiles, every non-Jew who were proud of their own culture. And Jesus brought them both together. If you turn to Ephesians, it says here, when I say this like this, you say, yeah I know that.

But it's one thing to know it in our head, it's quite another thing to know it in our experience. In Ephesians 3, it says here that by God's revelation, Ephesians 3, verse 2, there was a stewardship, a ministry of God's grace which is given to me for you. That by revelation, Ephesians 3, 3, it was made known to be the mystery.

Now the word mystery, as I've said before, is a new covenant word, which to understand it you need revelation. You can't understand it by study. Now we can study about the body of Christ and you won't

understand it.

The proof that you've understood it is if you can work together in a body. If you can't work together with other people or different, you have not understood the body at all, however much you understand the theory of it. If you can't accept people who are different from you in the body of Christ, you haven't understood this mystery.

The mystery is, and it says in verse 5, this was not made known in previous generations to anybody. It's a new covenant mystery. And the mystery is, the verse 6, that the Gentiles should become fellow heirs with the Jews in the body of Christ.

Now why does it speak so much about Jews and Gentiles? Because these are the two greatest opposites that the world has ever seen in terms of race and culture. We have in India high caste and low caste and there's a tremendous difference between them, but that's not as great as Jew and Gentile. In the history of the human race, Jew and Gentile was the two greatest opposites that ever existed from the time of Adam.

And when Jesus stretched out his hand on the cross, he was saying, I'm bringing together Jews and Gentiles to become one. So where a church is not willing and open to receive people of different nationalities, different races, different cultures, different intellectual levels, it has not understood anything about the body of Christ. And I don't think the Lord is there.

I heard of a story of a man who was converted and who went to a particular church where they would welcome only people of one particular race. And this man did not happen to be in that race. And his race was different, the color of his skin was different, and when he went to the door, the usher said, please find another church who don't think you'll be welcome here.

He was absolutely astounded. He had been converted just the previous week and he walked down the road and said, Lord, why is that? I wanted to go to that church and they wouldn't let me in. The Lord said, don't worry, I've been trying to get into that church myself for such a long time, they won't let me in.

So I'm not surprised that they don't let you. So when we don't let somebody in because he's different, we can be pretty sure the Lord himself is outside. So turn with me now to Colossians chapter.

Now you see that doesn't sound like a mystery that the Jews and Gentiles should be one. But you see how, see where it is being practiced and experienced. And you'll find, I mean, even in your own heart, in your own hearts, and you may sit in a church where you look around and say people are different nationalities here.

That's, that's not the issue. Do you accept them? Do you accept them as one with you? Do you fellowship with them? Or do you, do you naturally fellowship with people who are like you? Who are as educated as you are? Who are the same language as you? And say, in the same culture as you? If you're doing that, even if you sit in this church, I would say you have not seen the mystery. You have not seen it.

And I've seen many people who sit in CFC churches have not seen this mystery. Because they fellowship only with people of their own kind. Even though they sit in a church with people of different nationalities.

Or they people, they fellowship only with people of their same intellectual level. Now turn with me to Colossians and chapter 3. We read here that Paul was the one who got revelation on this. And he's the one who wrote about it in Ephesians and Colossians.

And do you know where Paul got this revelation? On the road to Damascus. When he fell off the horse and he heard the voice from saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He said, who are you Lord? I'm persecuting you. I'm Jesus whom you're persecuting.

That's where he realized that these Christians were part of the body of Jesus. Christians of different races. They were on the body of Jesus.

In other words, the head was there, the body was here. He began to get that revelation there. And he said, and later on, he began to understand that it was not just the Jews.

At that time, it was mostly only the Jews. There were a few Gentiles. But here he says in Colossians 3, now you have put on a new man, verse 10.

Colossians 3.10, which is being renewed in the image of the one who created him. And in this renewal, I mean, how do we know we've been renewed into the image of Christ? Here is it is. In this renewal, there is no distinction between Greek and Jew.

That means the two greatest opposites. There's no question of caste or culture. Makes absolutely no difference.

I'm united to a person on the basis of Christ. That's all. It is not true in the old covenant.

And circumcised or uncircumcised, I'm not even united to somebody on the basis of doctrinal unity. You know, I have met people who are baptized as babies, who are a hundred times more spiritual than some people who are baptized as adults. It's true.

I've seen them. And I have more fellowship with that believer who's baptized as a baby than this guy who was baptized as a believer. Because there's a far more humility in that man.

Far more Christ-likeness. I'm not saying baptism as a baby is right. It's 100% wrong.

But he's wrong in that doctrine. But I have fellowship with him. So it's not on the basis of doctrinal unity that the body of Christ is built.

Because we find in the body of Christ, there are people who have different views, even on the fullness of the spirit and all that. That's not the basis. These are truths in scripture.

We don't wait till a person understands these truths fully before I can fellowship with him. So it says in those days, it was circumcision. Paul says, it doesn't matter.

Circumcised or uncircumcised, it makes no difference. In the body of Christ, that doctrine or any other doctrine. For example, I believe with all my heart, like many of us do in our churches, that the church will go through the great tribulation and then Christ will come.

Now there are God-fearing believers who don't believe that, who believe that the church will be taken up before the tribulation. Fine. I can fellowship with such a person.

Because my fellowship is not based on unity in these doctrines which are not central. There are doctrines which are central. I mean, if he doesn't believe that Jesus Christ is God, then of course it's completely out of the question to fellowship with him.

If he doesn't believe in the Trinity, I won't be able to fellowship with him because he's denying the Father and the Son, which 1 John 2 says is the Antichrist. Now there are Christians who deny the Trinity. I don't believe I can have much fellowship with them.

I can love them. But they're denying the Trinity is a serious issue. And then the other thing is barbarian and Scythian, which is culture.

A barbarian is someone who's not refined and polished and cultured like most of us are. He's grown up in the jungles and he probably dresses in a crude way and he's got bad mannerisms and his mannerisms can hurt you. And if I can't accept such a man in the church and fellowship with him just because his culture is different or he's crude in the way he conducts himself and I can only fellowship with people who are refined and polished like me, then I have not understood anything about the body of Christ.

You ask yourself, you examine the list of people who you are close to. I'm talking to you here. Examine the list of people whom you are close fellowship with you and you may discover that unconsciously you're fellowshiping only with people who are exactly like you.

And then I'm sorry to say to you, but it's the truth. You have not seen the ABC of the body of Christ. Whatever else you may say.

I've seen in India, for example, Malayali people, they always fellowship with Malayalis. It's a language. It's a language of particular community.

They have certain mannerisms and they like people with those mannerisms. They prefer such people more than people in the body of Christ who are different. I said, they haven't seen the body of Christ.

I mean, you can't force them to see it. They got to see the mystery which comes by revelation. And there are people sitting like that in CFC churches or maybe another language.

They like people of that language because they communicate that way. So that's another thing. Barbarians who are different, who are cultured Greeks and there's uncultured barbarian fellowshiping together.

And the Scythian, the Scythian, by the way, is the man whom even the barbarian considers uncultured. This is completely extreme. Imagine all these people sitting together in one church.

Amazing. A slave and free man. That's the another thing where one person is a slave and those days slaves had no rights.

They were the lowest level of society. Imagine if we had people sitting here who were from the lowest level of society and free men, rich people from the other extreme and fellowshiping together. I'm not talking about communism where we share our money with everybody.

That's what communism teaches. Take from the rich and give to the poor. Jesus never taught that.

You find that there was a man in those days called Philemon who had a church meeting in his house and he had a slave, not a servant, a slave called Onesimus. You read the book of Philemon there in the Bible and Onesimus just ran away from home from that house one day and Paul found him and brought him to Christ and he sent him back to the master Philemon and he did not tell Philemon to liberate him or share your wealth with him. Now he's a brother in Christ.

Share your wealth with him. That's communism. Paul did not preach communism.

He said welcome him and be good and kind to him and forgive him and if he owes you any money, Paul says I'll pay it. So can you imagine this, they're meeting in the same house, Philemon's house, the church is meeting and when the church is meeting Onesimus calls Philemon brother Philemon but the moment the church meeting is over he has to say sir, master, the thing has changed in the same house. It must have been wonderful.

Imagine living in a house like that. That is how the body of Christ functions. That there's no change in social levels but it says in verse 11, Christ is all and in all.

I'll tell you this is a much bigger subject than what I have just spoken here but if you are sincere about wanting to know the body of Christ and experience you can ask yourself and examine yourself and see whether you gravitate to people who are exactly like you. Then you have not understood the ABC of the body of Christ. Whatever you may say, you may sit in NCCF or any other church like that.

If you've seen the body of Christ it makes, I'm not talking about talking to people. Oh we're all glad to talk to everybody. I'm talking about fellowship with people, becoming one with people.

Who are the people you're most close to? I'll tell you in India when we started the work in our church, the two of us who started, I'm basically from Kerala, a Malayali. The other brother Ian Robson was an Anglo-Indian. Now if you go throughout India you can see the two greatest opposites are Malayalis and Anglo-Indians.

Malayalis are arrogant Pharisees and Anglo-Indians are, they feel that we've got part of English blood in us and they can never, I've never seen Malayalis and Anglo-Indians getting together in the whole of India. You don't know that but it is true and God brought us together and forged us into a unity that's lasted for 44 years in an amazing way and we have so many different people in our church and we don't work together only with our own culture. No, we work with people of different cultures and I can say before God every one of them is exactly the same to me.

I work with people who are uneducated to the point where they cannot read or write. At one time we had an elder brother of one of our house churches who could not read or write. He was an elder, a leading brother in a CFC church and we have PhDs in CFC church as well and we don't make a distinction and if you come to the church you will not be able to make out who is the PhD and who is the uncultured one.

This is how we built the body. The body must not something we talk about theoretically, it must be demonstrated and there's a responsibility on each one of us in the church to do that, to have that attitude in our life which has to change. In other words, the attitude we are born with has to change fundamentally because most of us unconverted parents have instilled certain wrong values into our heads where this our own particular community, our own particular culture, thus we must fellowship with them.

So it's very very important in this area to break down these barriers. Turn with me now to Ephesians chapter 2 as to how this body was built. It says here in Ephesians 2, there was a time, verse 11, when he says, you Gentiles, verse 12, were separate from Christ and excluded from the commonwealth of Israel.

But now, verse 13, Ephesians 2, 13, in Christ you who are far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. See, the blood of Christ does some amazing things. It not only cleanses you, it cleanses us, we're very proud of that, but it brings us near and when you come near Christ, you come near other people

who've been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

I think of the illustration of a bicycle wheel. A bicycle wheel has got many spokes. They all come towards the center.

Initially they are far away from each other but as they approach the center, these spokes get closer to each other and I believe that's one way I discover that as I come, if I'm, one way I find out whether I'm coming closer to Christ or not, the center, is that I'm coming closer to some other brother who's coming from the other end of the spectrum who's also coming towards Christ. We're two extremes but as we come towards the center like the spokes of the bicycle wheel, we come closer to each other. Now if I'm not coming closer to those brothers, I'm deceiving myself that I'm coming closer to Christ.

I'm not coming closer to Christ. Intellectually I'm understanding so many things but it's not real in life and so, you know, you can see how prejudice is such a strong thing that when God wanted Peter to go and preach to the Gentile Cornelius, he had to give him a vision three times and speak to him from heaven and still it was such a problem for Peter to go but Peter broke that barrier and went. But here it says that those who are far off, verse 13, have been brought nigh by the blood of Christ and he has made, verse 14, both groups into one, breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall.

There's a barrier of a dividing wall between different races, nationalities, cultures in this world, between intellectuals and non-intellectuals and all that is broken down in Christ. When we think about the cross, that's what the cross does. The cross breaks down all those barriers.

So you cannot come into the body if you don't come by the way of the cross. That's what we spoke about the cross last time because one of the things the cross does is break down all these prejudices that I have and this attachment that I have to people of my own community my own social level, my own intellectual level, it's all broken down. Now one way to find out in your own case whether it is true or not, you ask yourself, who are your closest friends? People of your own community? Then probably you're deceiving yourself that that barrier has been broken down.

Is it people of your own intellectual level? Then probably you're deceiving yourself that that barrier has been broken down. It's not been broken down. You've seen many other things in the church but you have not seen the body of Christ.

The fundamental thing Jesus worked towards, you have not seen. So it says here barrier is not being broken down. There's a barrier of a dividing wall.

We peek over that barrier sometimes and say hi to different people but then go away and the barrier is still there. There's a lot of difference between the fellowship which is peeking over the wall and say hi, good to see you and talk to you and then go our own way. When the barrier is broken down there's intermingling freely.

And the other picture used here is the enmity in the flesh. Verse 15, Jesus abolished this enmity in the flesh which makes two people different. Do you know there's an enmity in our flesh to anyone who's different from me? You see doctors know that but if they take somebody else's skin and transplant it on your own body where your skin was scraped off, you need to give the guy so many medicines so that it will accept this foreign skin that has come into this.

Even in our human body there's an aversion to having somebody else's skin on me. And that's a picture of how it is in our relationship. There's an enmity within and I'll tell you this verse, the enmity in the flesh is the main reason why husbands and wives fight with each other even though they say they love one another and they say so many wonderful things to each other and call each other by all fantastic names.

The enmity in the flesh makes them clash, makes them lose their temper, makes them demand that you must do things my way. These are all because of the enmity in the flesh and both of them are not taking up the cross to put that enmity to death. And so they married for years but it's still there, clashing with each other.

I don't believe it should be like that. I mean it's people who don't take up the cross will naturally clash all their life. But it's a wonderful thing that we can have where if I recognize there's an enmity in my flesh towards anyone who's different from me.

Say to yourself, there's an enmity in my flesh to anyone who thinks differently from me. Not only whose culture is different but who thinks differently. And you must say my wife thinks differently from me, my husband thinks differently from me.

I've got an enmity in my flesh to that. I've got to kill that if I want to become one with my wife, otherwise with my husband or wife. Otherwise you'll never be one.

You can give a superficial appearance of unity but it's a deception. Everybody likes to look before others that yeah we are loving husband and wife, we are united. But if you don't kill the enmity in your flesh, I want to say to all of you married folks, you will never be one.

You have to recognize that enmity in the flesh and say that was crucified on the cross. And say Lord I want to be crucified with you. And then that I don't want to have that inward rejection of anyone.

Whatever their nationality, language, culture, social level, education level. I want to mingle with people who are completely different from me. And sometimes we have to do it deliberately.

You know, I in the early days when I began to understand this, I deliberately sought fellowship with people who are completely different from me. I would even use, try to speak to them in their broken language. It didn't matter if they laughed at my attempt to speak their language.

I was trying to build fellowship. And that's how I learned some languages in India that I did not know as I sought to build fellowship. And that's how we built the body of Christ, where there's no distinction.

And I praise the Lord for that. And the whole purpose is, it says in verse 15 that out of the two we can make one new man. The two have to become one new man.

It's an amazing thing. Just like in the Bible says about husband and wife becoming two, becoming one flesh. In the body of Christ two becoming one new man.

So that in his own body he can reconcile both through the cross to God. This is an amazing passage here in verse 16 because on the cross it says in verse 16, he put that enmity to death. So I want to ask you whether you have accepted the cross of Jesus Christ in this way, where that enmity has been put to death, that you're willing to accept a person whose Christ has accepted, who is completely different from you.

See I remember once when one sister came to our church and she was wearing a lot of jewelry because my wife and I've had a strong conviction against jewelry all our lives. But I recognize not everybody has light on it. So I told the sister, I want you to read 1 Peter chapter 3 and 1 Timothy chapter 2 and see what the Bible says about this subject.

Don't take my word for it. And see what the Bible says about women wearing jewelry. Then next week when you come, tell me before we baptize you.

And she came back next week and she still had all that jewelry on. And I said, did you read those passages? She said, yes. What do you think? She said, I need more time.

She was honest. She didn't say that she disagreed with it. She said needed more time.

So I said, fine. And the Lord said to me at that time, I have accepted her with her jewelry. She's born again.

Are you holier than me that you can't accept her? I said, sure, I accept her too. No problem. Even though she's got a completely different conviction from me in this area.

And I baptize her. No problem. So we find that if I really, we really seek to follow Christ, example, we find a lot of these barriers breaking down easily and we don't become stubborn on silly little things that bring a difference between us and others in the body of Christ.

Okay. I want to say a word about functioning in the body of Christ. And it says in 1 Corinthians 12 about this body functioning with different gifts.

1 Corinthians chapter 12, we read, I don't want you to be unaware of gifts, spiritual gifts, brethren. 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 14, there are varieties of gifts for the same spirit. And he speaks about, to one is given, verse 8, the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith, to another gift of healing, verse 9, to another miracle, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing of spirits, to another speaking in tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

And then he goes on to say, these are all different members of the body. Verse 14, the body is not one member but many. And if the foot says, oh, I'm not a hand, so I'm not a part of the body.

That's people who have an inferiority complex in the body of Christ. Oh, I feel inferior. I'm not as gifted as that man.

I'm like the foot, always covered up with shoes and socks, nobody sees me. And the hand is always waving around and people seeing it, the more prominent member of the body, I'm not like that, so I'm not part of the body. And the ear says, I can't see.

People appreciate the eye is so important and, you know, people would rather be deaf rather than blind. You know that if you had a choice between being deaf and blind, you know, you choose being deaf. Blind is more serious and he says, they value the eye much more than the ear.

So I'm only an ear, so I'm not really part of the body. And look at the answer the Holy Spirit gives, verse 17, the whole body were an eye. What about hearing? That's important, man.

Or the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? And so it's not just hand, it's not just foot, it's not just eyes, not ear. Each has got a function and one does not have to be like the other. So it says here, verse 7, to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The varieties of ministries, verse 5, the varieties of effects and we don't all have to be the same. That's the point here. You don't all have to be the eye or all have to be the ear, in spite of that clear teaching in 1 Corinthians 12.

Listen to me and see where Christendom has gone astray. Verse 8, to one is given the word of wisdom. Does anybody say everybody must have the word of wisdom? I don't think so.

Okay. To another is given the word of knowledge, and I believe that's the ability to teach scripture. And does everybody have that ability? No.

It's given to one, the word of knowledge. Wisdom is how to apply that knowledge in practical situations. To another is given faith to do certain miracles, not necessarily healing miracles, other types of miracles in answer to prayer.

To another, faith. To another, the gift of healing. Does anybody say that every believer must have the gift of healing? No.

Because you recognize the body, different gifts. To another, the effecting of miracles. Does anyone say all must do miracles? No.

Or prophecy, discerning of spirits. Then the last part of verse 10, speaking in tongues. Ah, this is where some people say all must speak in tongues.

You see the complete fallacy of that, completely contradicting what is taught in 1 Corinthians 12. Everybody must be like the eye or the ear. But it says to one is given this, to another is given this, to another given this.

But there are a group of Christians, particularly among Pentecostals, charismatic, who say everybody must speak in tongues. I have disagreed with it. I wish I could say 200% but 100% I disagree with it completely because it's God's Word.

It's a gift given to some. To deny it is wrong. To say that everybody must speak in it is also wrong.

So the thing we need to recognize is that we must function in our own gift and not be jealous of someone who has another gift. Do you find somebody who can preach 10 times better than you? What should you do? Appreciate it, value that person and don't try to be like him but rejoice. We read in Philippians chapter 1, it's a sad thing mentioned there in Philippians 1, that when Paul was jailed, you read that in Philippians 1, I think it's verse between 19 and 25.

He said some people were so happy, oh Paul is in jail, now I can get up and preach and everybody will appreciate my preaching. As long as Paul was here I could never compete with him but he's not here now. And you know what Paul said? He said, praise the Lord, Christ is being preached.

I don't care who gets the honor out of it. The people are being saved and the body's being built. They do it with the wrong motive, so what? So you find there are people like that who long to have somebody else's gift.

It's one of the worst things you can think of. Don't seek for somebody else's gift. It's like you know the hand can't talk and try to talk like the hand.

If the hand tries to talk it'll make a mess. It can't. That tongue is one part of the body, God gives it to someone so there's no competition in the body.

Let me use another example. See if I'm right-handed, I sign my check with my right hand. Now if I try to sign a check with the left hand, it won't be recognized as a valid signature, doesn't even look like a class signature.

So supposing one day my right hand is injured and I'm in a sling, even the hand itself is in a sling, what does the right left hand say? Ah, this is my opportunity to do something. I sign checks and the bank doesn't accept it. That is not what the left hand does.

The left hand says I want to do everything possible to restore that right hand to health so that it didn't come back to function. I want to ask you whether you have that type of attitude to someone in the body of Christ who maybe you don't like too much but you've got a 10 times better gift than you and when he's something happens to him or he's not there and you want to show how prominent you are. The spirit of competition or wanting to show I am one of the most important brothers in the body of NCCF.

You think it can't come up here? It can come up anywhere and it can come up in very gifted people wanting to take prominence. I'm one of the gifted ones and I'm thankful that I'm recognized as one of the top three or the top five or something like that. Boy, it's the devil.

100% the devil and it can come into NCCF. It can come into you. You can think you're very spiritual, very gifted.

Recognize and be thankful for whatever gift God's given you but recognize like I often use the illustration of somebody may say I'm only a little finger and somebody else says I'm not even a finger I'm only a nail. I'll tell you when you feel itchy the only thing that'll help is a nail. The despised nails.

Your tongue can't help, your ear can't help, your eye can't help, your leg can't help just the nails. So even if you're a small little member like that you can scratch somebody's back. That's the easy thing.

Is it difficult to scratch somebody's back? Somebody says hey I'm feeling itchy on my back, my hand can't reach out there. Can you scratch my back for me? A lot of husbands and wives do that for each other. You know what that ministry is? The ministry of scratching people's back.

And the Bible is called the ministry of encouragement. Very easy. It's as easy as scratching somebody's back and every one of us can have it.

That's one gift we can all have. It's not specifically mentioned here as one of the gifts of the spirit. It's an ability that we can all exercise to encourage one another and concentrate on that till God gives you some other gift.

Do the small things and then one day God will give you a bigger gift. But I'll tell you something here. It's an amazing word here in verse 7. To every single one there is given some manifestation of the spirit for the good of the whole body.

Do you believe that? That every part of this human body has got a function. They used to say in the olden days about the appendix inside the body that we don't know what function it is but I think doctors have discovered some function for it now. It's better to say I don't know what it is than if God created it there must be a function for it.

So don't ever say that you don't have any function in this body of Christ. And I'm talking about a spiritual ministry. I'm not just, I'm not talking about playing some musical instrument.

That's not a spiritual gift at all. Playing a musical instrument has got nothing to do with the Holy Spirit because the greatest musicians in the world are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Singing is not a spiritual gift because the greatest singers in the world are not filled with the Holy Spirit.

You can be a wonderful singer and a wonderful musician and nothing of the Holy Spirit at all. You can be an atheist. Those are not the gifts of the Spirit.

Those are physical gifts, gifts which anybody in the world has. We can use it but that's not a gift of the Spirit. A sharp intellect, that's not a gift of the Spirit.

A lot of worldly people have it. A gift of the Spirit is something supernatural that God gives you. Now what I want to say is like I told you about the ministry of encouragement.

It's something we can all do if we want to. If you begin with something small God will give you something more. And maybe just serving food or cleaning the toilets.

And then when I started my ministry as a young 23 year old I used to go to some conferences. You know what I did? The huge conference of 5,000 people. I would carry a bucket of rice and the curry and go around serving everybody sitting on the floor.

That's what I did. That was my ministry. That's how I began.

I couldn't preach but I could serve food. So I started with that. I cleaned the toilets.

And I want to say to you, you start with something small and say, Lord this is what I can do and I'll do it. Don't aim for some prominent thing. No.

And one day God will give you a gift. But if you're not willing to start with the small things, maybe that's the reason why until today God has given you nothing. Because you're always aiming for something big and you're not willing to start with something small.

Even though you're a young person you want something big. Well no wonder all your life you'll be like this my brother, sister. You will waste your life.

I've seen people who have been in CFC for 20, 30 years. Absolutely useless. Because they're always looking for something big.

They're not willing to do something small. My dear brother, listen to this. To every single person God wants to give you some manifestation of the Spirit.

Go back home and read 1 Corinthians 12 verse 7 and say, Lord why am I not having some manifestation of the Spirit in my life? And your word says everyone has, can have it. Is it because I'm too proud to do the

lowly things? Well it doesn't matter if you're old. Begin with something small.

And the easiest thing to do is to encourage people. Start with that and maybe one day God will make you a prophet. Or give you some ministry or evangelism to bring people to Christ or teaching.

But don't ever be satisfied saying, I just come to the meeting. My gift is to warm the chair every Sunday afternoon and sit there and put a little money in the box and sing. No.

A lot more than that. And I don't mean it has all to be here. You can fulfill that ministry and with your friends who are not part of NCCF.

You can witness to them and encourage them. People who are completely outside this fellowship. Somebody you know.

See there are certain people who you know, who nobody else in this hall knows. You recognize that? It's true. There are certain people only you know, even your wife does not know.

Or your husband does not know. There are certain group of people in the world, you, only you know them. And I remember hearing this interpretation of one John 3.16 once.

When somebody in India said this. He said, John 3.16 says, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. And he said, there is a small world of people whom I know and only I know, just like I said now.

And God so loved that small world of people that he sent me, his son, into that small world of people whom I know that they should not perish but have eternal life. So I see myself as having been sent by God, like John 3.16, into the small world of people who only I know, so that I can communicate to them the message of eternal life. Every one of us has that possibility.

Why? Because there are some people you know, nobody else in this church knows. God so loved that little world of people that he sent you, his only son or daughter, there so that you, not that they'll all get converted. I mean Jesus was the greatest person who walked on the earth and people didn't even all get converted when they heard him.

Very few people got converted. So maybe one in a thousand who hear you will get converted, that's fine. But maybe that is the one person who God wants you to reach.

Say, Lord, what is my gift in the body of Christ? I want to fulfill it. I want to say another thing about the body of Christ and its authority. It says in Matthew chapter 18 that where two are gathered together, minimum is two.

Now there are a lot of things you can do alone. Encourage others? Sure. You don't need anybody else, all by yourself you can encourage on the phone, in an email, one sentence, I'm praying for you, then God will bless you.

Or I'm praying for that, if you're facing a problem, I just want to say, I'm standing with you in prayer. One sentence can be a tremendous encouragement to somebody. It doesn't cost us anything to say it, if you don't say it.

Have you heard that story? There's a true story by the way, I'll never forget it, of a man in this Bay Area in San Francisco many years ago, who jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge and committed suicide. And the folks went, and the authorities went and picked up his body, and they found a note in his, they found where he was living, and he was living in a small room by himself somewhere in town. And they went to his room, and they found a note there on the table, I am going to commit suicide today, jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.

And there's a many long walk, or many miles, but in that long walk from my house to the Golden Gate Bridge, if I see one person who smiles at me, I will not commit suicide. And he walked all that way, he even smiled at me. You know how busy people are, I'm not saying we should go around smiling at everybody, that's not the message I'm trying to convey.

What I'm saying is, what I'm trying to convey is there are needy people around you, some of whom are on the verge of suicide. Maybe some people you know, and sometimes they're very discouraged, particularly in your school or college. I often think about Joseph going to that chief cupbearer of Pharaoh and saying, why are you looking so discouraged? One sentence opened up the door for Joseph to stand before Pharaoh and become the ruler of Egypt.

Everything hinged on that one sentence. If he had not encouraged those people that day, he would never have become ruler of Egypt. You read that story and see in Genesis.

So I've often thought of that man who walked by with nobody to greet him, and I wonder if there are people who I know perhaps, maybe sometimes you're prompted to give them a call and say, well, how are you doing? If you're sensitive to the Holy Spirit, you can fulfill that. But here it says about an authority that we have when we are two. We're two, Matthew 18, verse 20, are gathered together in my name, I'm in the midst.

That does not happen when you're alone. It's a body. The minimum of two, you need another brother or sister, or perhaps your husband or wife, Jesus is in the midst.

And verse 19, we agree together. And verse 18, we bind satanic forces. My wife and I have used that promise for many times with our children.

The problems they face in school or sickness or anything you say, Lord, we are now we are united, you're in our midst, we are agreed together, and we bind the satanic activity here in Jesus name. I can't even number the, I can't even count the number of times we did that. I want to encourage you.

Seek, that's why the devil tries his best to bring disunity between you and your wife or you and your husband, because he doesn't want you to have that authority in your home. He wants your children to go astray. He wants you to have no authority in your home and he wants you to not be useless for the body of Christ.

So keep them united, keep them, keep them separated, keep them separated, keep them divided. And I believe one reason why in our CFC back in Bangalore, where the devil's never been able to come in 44 years is because brother Ian and I have been united for 44 years. We disagree, we agree to disagree on things, but we're not disunited.

There's never been a single day in all these 44 years where I could not look him straight in the eye and fellowship with him, not even one day. It's not blind agreement, no, but unity. Christ is in the midst and I

want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters, do your part to build a body like this.

There's a lot more that can be said, but if you read scripture you'll understand. But it is, one last thing, why is the church called the body of Christ? Because the first body of Christ demonstrated the father to the world and Jesus said, as the father sent me, so send I you. So exactly the same ministry the first body of Christ did, we are to do today as a body.

Bless people, encourage them, explain the father to them, explain Christ to them. Acts, you know, when Luke is writing to Theophilus in Acts 1.1, he says, the first account that I wrote, which is the gospel of Luke, is all about what Jesus did and taught in the days when he was on earth. So if you ask Luke, well Luke, what is the title? That's his title for Luke's gospel.

So Luke, what is your title for Acts of the Apostles? He'd say, what Jesus continued to do and teach through his spiritual body. That was through his physical body, this is through his spiritual body and we are called in that to continue in that way as a body of Christ, to carry on the ministry that Jesus had when he came to earth. Amen.

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