

# Membership discussion

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Preacher: Philip Wells and others

[ 0 : 00 ] Because that's the way he set it up. Be a disciple of him, he says. And here are these other disciples and you've got to relate to them. You've got to belong to his community.

And if you've come along this evening, you're not a Christian, then the function of this is not to try and tell you that you are a Christian if you're not, but to say, if you sign up to be a Christian, then this is the sort of thing you sign up to be if you belong to.

If you want to follow the Lord Jesus. And if you are a Christian, the aim has been throughout, hopefully, to encourage us to join together, to encourage us to join and live out this big vision of God for the communities of his churches until he comes.

And I think the propulsion is, it's a beautiful vision. And there's something rather lovely about belonging to this. And I hope we can encourage one another in that.

It's not, this whole matter of membership is not a matter of adding something to scripture, which is foreign to what scripture says, but to say yes to the things that the Bible has in the New Testament as main thoughts and main aims.

[ 1 : 29 ] So this is the first one, love, and this is just a cut and paste. Then, I keep on cutting out, don't I? Let's put this one there. Could you put this mic on as well, just so that it picks up when I, if I can have both of them, that'd be good.

So, love, and the question was, does the Bible say a lot about love? And the answer is, it says so much it was difficult to put all of it in.

So, Romans 12 was one of the classic passages, which we've just read. Love must be sincere, be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Galatians 5 says, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

So, the fruit of the Spirit is love. And we had the classic passage that we looked at, I think, the other week. And the comment was, that the New Testament breathes love.

It's full of love. That's one of the things that shines out from the New Testament and the communities of the New Testament. It says that the community is based in the love of Jesus Christ and pays the hefty bills in love.

[ 3 : 24 ] There's a sacrificial element to love. And that was a very quick taste of that reflection we had those weeks ago on love.

Is there anything that anybody would like to clarify about that? Because unless I preach the whole thing all over again, that's all I'm going to say on that one.

The second one was the one about what is reformed. And I, do you remember this?

Do you remember this? Yeah. If you're deciding which church to belong to, what characterizes this church?

Well, I'll go back a step and say it's evangelical, which means it is, it believes the Bible to be God's true word.

[ 4 : 24 ] And it believes that what that true word says is the gospel of Jesus Christ coming to earth. Jesus Christ being God and man.

Jesus Christ coming to earth to die for our sins. Jesus Christ being risen from the dead, ascended into heaven. Jesus Christ being risen from the dead, ascended into heaven.

That's what evangelical means. But on this particular sermon, I talked about what reformed means. And we looked at the two ways of looking at it.

This way that says free will is the bottom line and determines everything. And this one says that God's grace is actually the bottom line, which determines everything.

And we went through the depth of sin, that human beings are blind, dead, rebellious, and can't do anything for their salvation. Can't clinch their salvation.

[ 5 : 46 ] That Christ, by his cross, is offered to everyone. But that his cross is not simply an offer and simply a gesture, but effectively secures the salvation of his people.

That God calls people on their ears with the external call of the gospel, but that God goes even further than that.

And whispers inside the heart of people so that they actually believe and turn, which is called the effectual call. We believe that faith is not quite saying, Jesus died for me.

It's not that the preacher urges people to believe that. But so much as that to urge people to put their trust in Christ on the basis of what he did, whether it's big or small or whoever or whatever. But he did it and we put our trust in what he did. So it's faith in his person based on his action.

[ 6 : 52 ] Concerning the future, if it's free human will, people might choose not to believe. But we are told that faith is a gift of God and we're then in his hands and no one can pluck us out of his hands.

And he wonderfully keeps us. Amen to that, yes. And concerning choice and will, we don't make free will the ultimate determining factor.

People do have wills. They do have a faculty of choice. And the Bible engages with that. But when people choose, the secret reality of it is that they only choose God because he first chose them in a secret and mysterious way.

But that's what reformed doctrine says. So I won't stop and preach that one all over again. But was there any point that anybody wanted to clarify on that?

Okay. The third one that we looked at was, oh, sorry. There's a cash value to this. The cash value is that having this as the basis of what is preached means that the ministry of the word, in all sorts of ways that that is done, the building of the church and the preaching to the unconverted has a robustness and a humility which sort of colors the whole of that ministry.

[ 8 : 37 ] So it's robust because it's grasped the depths and mysteries and wonder of the whole plan of God in a way which I don't think this scheme does.

And there's a humility because we know that it's God who's at work. It's all by his grace. And I think that's a very healthy thought that just colors the whole of word ministry.

So I just picked that out as a sort of implication. So the third one, which is what Chris preached on service. So I'm going by what I was told.

It was on John 13. And I think Chris said that Jesus had a servant heart. So I put in the word mind there as well. And he commands us.

In that passage it says, If I, your master, have done this, blessed are you if you do it.

[ 9 : 42 ] I think that's what it says. Isn't that one of the verses? So I've sort of extended that thought from the mind and the heart to the hand. Because there's a blessing of being a servant. And I've put there the implication of the beauty and loveliness of service.

To be in a community of people who are committed not to look out for number one. And to get as much out of other people as possible. But to be in a community where people are committed to serving.

And helping the others more than they help themselves. I think it's a rather counter-cultural, unusual sort of community to be in.

Do you agree? And it raises the question, which group of Christians am I committed to serving?

And committed to serving with?

And it has that invitation. Let's serve one another. That's what belonging is. And that was number three.

[ 10 : 48 ] That I do justice to your... Okay. Right. That's number three. Let's sing something. We're going to sing the Servant King 396.

We are saying, I want people to bring that up. I buy my sin on myself and them. And that they have a right to rebuke me.

And that I have a duty to seek their best interests by rebuking them for their good. So if my brother or sister is doing something sinful, spiritually stupid, spiritually risky.

I don't say, oh well that's their business. I say, actually we're in this together. So I need to find a way to speak to that brother or sister in a way which is most appropriate to bring them back.

To cause them to say, I was out of order. I was wrong. This is a wrong point of view. I will seek to come back. And one thing I didn't point out was the splinter and the plank.

[12:06] Anybody tell us about the splinter and the plank? Julie, get there first. And do not try and take the splinter at your brother's eye when you've got a plank in your eye.

In other words, you know, have a look to yourself before you try and take something away from others. And I think that also comes into that is when you point the finger at somebody.

You know, there's an old saying when you point your finger at somebody, there's three points of that at you. I never understood that until you said that. Yes, that's right. Yes, I never understood that.

Yeah. Yeah. It's like that. It's like make your own house clean. Yeah. And then you can make someone else's house clean. Yeah. But rather don't...

Exactly. Which points out what a spiritually demanding thing it is to try to challenge somebody else, to correct somebody else, to point out the splinter in their eye.

[13:09] It's not something we should do. It's not something we should just sort of do off the cuff. We should do, but with care. So I didn't mention that at the time, but it's an important thing.

But I have no right to live without concern for my effect on them. And I have no right to live without concern to rebuke them for their good.

And the summary point, that we live in a community and a body whose sinews and ligaments are responsibility and accountability, which is a sort of pseudo-biological metaphor to say that we are accountable to one another.

We have that relationship with one another. So I won't preach the whole sermon again. That was number four on accountability. Anybody want to clarify anything?

I'm just thinking, if you've got your brother's got splinter in his eye, you know, and you may have a pain in your own mind.

[14:18] I mean, none of us are perfect, so that sounds almost like you'd have to be perfect before you can rebuke somebody for something that they're doing. So I wonder if it's just maybe you could, you could, maybe you don't, if you're doing that, certain things like that.

I don't know, that's because it seems we'd have to be very perfect, wouldn't we? Yeah, I don't think it's, it is about life in this imperfect world. I don't think that Jesus would mean we would have to be perfect, otherwise none of us, that would just be entirely hypothetical.

But I think it is saying, just look at ourselves first. You know, have you ever taken a splinter out of somebody's eye, a corner of your handkerchief which you lick, or get them to lick, and then you go like that?

You know, you really need a lot of care, don't you? And if you can't see properly what you're doing, you're going to hurt their eye. I think that's the point. It just sort of brings us up to think, do it, but do it carefully.

It's only me who's ever licked a corner of a handkerchief, and that was my mum did that, I'm thinking. I think we're all different. I was going to say, I'm not saying, sorry, I've got a little voice. One more thing.

[15:40] So we're all different sometimes in things. Because the Lord says for us to forgive others as he has forgiven us, you know, sometimes we can make judgments on others.

Now, I guess that also depends on what you've been forgiven for. You know, for me, I could maybe forgive something that another person may find very difficult to forgive, but that's because I've been forgiven for it.

So I won't stand in judgment against that person. So, you know, in my lifetime, in my past, you know, I was a thief. So if I hear a thief, you know, some other people may say, you know, I'll stand in judgment.

But I'm a sinner because I won't want to, you know, because I've been forgiven for me. Yeah. Yeah. I don't think it's, yeah, I suppose our gut reaction to different people's issues, it is going to vary from person to person, isn't it?

So some things we might say, oh, well, that's what people do, or others might really affect us. I don't think that forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven us is linked to specific sins.

[17:10] I think it's more that aspect that he's forgiven us. So who are we to hold a sort of grudge against a brother or sister?

And what you say is very important because there are some things that we're not, the emphasis is that we forgive people rather than that we try and get back at them or something like that.

So there's a subtlety about the way we relate to another. We're not all supposed to be just constantly going around hauling one another up on this or that. Yeah.

Anything else on that, Steve? Well, on that point, I think the Bible says a lovely thing about correcting your opponent with gentleness, about pleading in the garments spotted by the flesh. I think that the rebuke is always, if it's made, it's not, you know, I'm telling you off because I'm right. But it's always, look, I have to warn you against this because you could drag me into your sin or drag me or somebody else into your sin.

[ 18 : 22 ] And I think if you think of it that way, I mean, that is what the Old Testament thing is about cutting out the evil from amongst you or something.

Yeah. It's not really, it's for the benefit of everybody, not to prove that you're right and somebody else is wrong. Yeah.

Yeah. No, and I think, you know, so we're getting into a debate, but I don't think anyone that's wrong is trying to prove their right in front of the Lord.

You know, they freely admit their guilt, but it doesn't mean to say that, you know, they're not forgiven of that. You know, there isn't some, it isn't a law against man thing, is it?

This isn't the Lord's involved in it. Let me say a... You don't want our hands up to breaking the law. Because that's what we are.

[ 19 : 22 ] When we come around the Lord's table, we're saying we're all sinners and we all need the broken body and the shed blood. So one of the things that I remember somebody saying last week was, if you were Harvey, how do you pronounce his name?

Weinstein? Wein? Weinstein. Okay. Everybody's out to get you if you're Harvey Weinstein.

Your name is Mud, isn't it? And every place you go, people will say, we're not as bad as you. You're an awful man. There's only one place that he could possibly go where people by policy say, join us because we're all sinners.

We all need forgiveness, which is the church of Jesus Christ. That's not saying we would condone his sin, because we don't condone our sin, do we? But we would say, if you have the heart to come to the same saviour that we've come to, join us because we're all sinners.

And we've found forgiveness. And here's a place where you can be on a level ground with everybody else. Because every other community, they're saying, we look down on you because you are so much worse than we are.

[ 20 : 42 ] Well, this is an interesting thought, isn't it? What a challenge that would be if he came through the door this evening. I mean, there's all sorts of things to be working through.

But do you get my point? That of all the places, of all the communities, only the church welcomes sinners. Because that's what Jesus did.

He's interested in sinners like a doctor is interested in sick people. Right. The next one was supposed to be... Can I move on from accountability?

Yeah, raise me. I just want to say that it's also rebuking people for their good. But also, it surely has an effect on the witness of the church to the outside people as well.

Yeah. Yes. Yes. Thank you. Yeah, that's right. That's right. Yeah. The...

[ 21 : 45 ] Yeah. You're right. Yeah. Thank you. The next one was gifts. So, I think I've got this out of order. Oh, I've just put in there informal discipline and formal discipline.

So, the discipline of the church is not simply the nuclear option of telling it to the church and the church and the person being excommunicated if they won't listen to the church.

But there's all the stages in between and all the various forms that can take. So, I think our membership service rightly includes informal discipline, meaning a little quiet word or whatever, which nobody else may even know about.

We have lots of... Yeah. There we go. Right. Right. Are we okay with that? Thank you. No. I've got this out of order.

So, the last one was gifts. And the passage that I've put up there is Romans 12, which we read.

[ 22 : 50 ] And to summarize, the Christian church, global and local, because I think this is a global thing as well as local.

We're not very good at the global aspect of this. Global and local is meant to cooperate in unity. Oh, I've put... To operate in unity and cooperation like a body with many parts.

That's how it's meant to operate. And the contribution of each part is also known as a gift. I think the two thoughts are interchangeable. And from the 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, we get a very strong

emphasis that we're not just talking about management.

We're talking about love. Love. Because whatever gift I have, if it's not used in love, it's nothing. It's a very striking statement that Paul makes about very great gifts.

But if there's no love, it's nothing. And the point he also makes in that passage that no part is too weak or humble or lowly to belong.

[ 24 : 10 ] So it isn't just... The gifts aren't just the super gifted people, the super qualified people. But nobody is omitted. We can't say to anybody, I have no need of you.

Can't be bothered with you. That's a very important teaching, isn't it, that? And he also says in the 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, my understanding of it is that his fundamental principle there is that building the body is by means of understandable speech.

And it's understandable speech that is the particularly desirable work of the spirit. And I think that's his main point in 1 Corinthians 13, 14, 15.

Anybody want to... I'm not going to preach that one again either, but anybody want to come back on that? Or ask a clarification? Super.

Right. Now then, I've got these slides out of order. So my question was, had I planned a song? Let me go back. Yes, I had.

[ 25 : 27 ] 548. So here's a question.

What points of up-building can we make? In what way can we encourage one another? See, I've strayed into the sea, haven't I? How can we build one another up in our practice, our thinking, our attitude to belonging to one another?

And see, encourage one another. Hebrews 3... No, that's not... I've put 3.13, but I think it might be 13.3. Let's see if we can find this one.

It is... It's neither of those. This is the one where it says, encourage one another so much the more...

I think it's 10.25. Yeah. Yeah. If you take 10.24 and 25, it says, let us consider how we may spur one another on.

[ 26 : 47 ] I was looking for a one another. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching.

And he's saying that there's something about the meeting, which is an antidote to forgetting, falling away, carrying on in sin, making shipwreck of our lives.

So it's quite a strong thought, isn't it? Let's encourage one another as we see the day approaching. So fairly wide range there.

Anything that anybody would like to share with us for clarification or for upbuilding or to encourage one another, as it says here?

Is it? Yes, please. It says, but encourage one another daily as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin.

[ 28 : 06 ] Ah, right. Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Yes. It was right.

Encourage one another daily so long as it is called today. Yeah. I didn't think that's the one I'd written down, but it is, isn't it?

So that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Thank you. That is the right one.

Okay. I'm going to sit down and see what people have to say, if anything.

Thank you.