

When churches disagree

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 February 2016

Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] If you'd like to open your Bibles at Acts 15, let me start with a question. Please put your hands up if you are opposed to Christian unity.

! I thought I was fairly safe there, though I did have a plan B just in case somebody did put their hands up. I can't remember who it was. I thought at first it was the Bible scholar F.F. Bruce and then I thought maybe it was John Stott.

But somebody of that generation said on one occasion, the Bible is for Christian unity. I hastened to add he was being ironic, of course. You can't be against Christian unity, really, can you?

It's like, as Americans say sometimes, you can't vote against apple pie and motherhood. They're just things so obviously good that you can't be against them. And yet, when you come and think what that actually means in practice, you realise that that is much more complicated than some of these rather simple things might suggest.

So let me now just look at two things that Paul wrote about Christian unity. I'll just put a few verses up there on the slide. Ephesians 4 verse 3, we're probably pretty familiar with.

[1 : 23] It says, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. And then it goes on to say various things about gentleness and bearing on each other and so on.

So you might think, well, that's not that difficult, is it? We've got to make an effort, but it seems fairly straightforward. But then this, I think, probably much less known and less quoted verse, we find in Galatians chapter 2, the one that's obviously relevant particularly to this dispute that happened in Acts 15.

Galatians 2, 11 to 13 says the following, The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, So that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.

So Paul here is criticising two of the great leaders of the church, Peter the apostle and Barnabas, his long-time friend. How is that making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit?

And yet, I think, when we think about it, when we look into this passage, we'll say, actually it is. Unity is something that has to be fought for. It doesn't just kind of happen.

[3 : 08] So in Acts 15, Luke addresses actually two challenges to Christian unity. In verses 1 to 33, which we read, he points at the problems that arise from too much distance.

Churches that are too far apart geographically or culturally, and therefore find it difficult to get on. But the end of this chapter, which we'll look at next week, just fairly short verses, but I find them almost unbelievable.

There are a lot of miracles and things in Acts, but I think Acts 6, the end of Acts 15, is probably the most difficult thing to believe in the whole of Acts.

But we'll look at that next week. Those are the problems that arise from too much proximity, when people who have worked together for years, suddenly something, root of bitterness, as Paul describes it, can spring up.

And it can go sour. So we'll look at the first part, the Council at Jerusalem this week. Now, as I pointed out when we started looking in Acts, Luke always writes as an observer rather than a commentator, as a historian.

[4 : 32] And remember, this is Scripture, so it's inspired by the Holy Spirit. And we remember that there is one Spirit, but there are diverse gifts, and there are therefore diverse sorts of Scripture.

And we need to treat them in the proper way. There are passages of theology, and other passages of Scripture contain a lot more commentary, a lot more organized theology.

But Luke doesn't work that way. Luke tells us what happens. He tells us these things under the guidance of the Spirit, because it's something we need to know about.

And in both these passages, this one and the end of the chapter, we almost want to sort of scream at him, I need more data, Luke, I need more help, clues here. But he doesn't give us that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And if we're going to complain to Luke, then we complain to the Holy Spirit himself. So Luke says, this is what happened. Now go figure it out for yourself.

[5 : 37] Perhaps this is because, perhaps there is a reason for this, perhaps this is because, while you can spoon-feed information, you can't really spoon-feed wisdom. Wisdom always has to be struggled for.

So let's have a look at this issue. And we have to say that, as I said earlier, the Church's record on unity, over the last 2,000 years, is really not very good.

We know, perhaps, about the Trinitarian controversies of the Church Fathers, and all the other struggles that the Church Fathers had, to keep the Church united.

In medieval times, there was the Great Schism in 1054, which separated the Western Church and the Eastern Church, where they just couldn't get on together and started excommunicating each other.

That's why, today we have the Western Church and the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. They split, basically in 1054.

[6 : 42] And then we'd move forward to the Protestant Reformation and might think, well, at least that was by the Spirit. We should at least have a good record on church unity.

Do we? I think we'd probably say, we're the worst of the lot. Schism and fragmentation is endemic in the Protestant churches.

Let me paraphrase a recent TV ad. One might say that unity is like flossing, you know, flossing your teeth.

Everyone agrees it's important, but nobody actually does it. And I think that's probably true.

Everybody agrees unity is important, but do we actually do it?

So let's ask ourselves some quite challenging questions and see how this passage can help us to answer them. But as I say, just as unity is harder than it looks, these questions may actually be harder than they look.

[7 : 49] So these are the questions I want to ask. First of all, does it actually matter? What is, does unity matter? And if so, why does it matter?

And then secondly, what exactly is it, what exactly is unity? And I kind of mean it, what exactly is unity in practice? Can unity be imposed externally?

Does it right to interfere in the affairs of another church? Is it right to set up in competition with another church? And we'll look at that sort of question.

And then we'll look how the elders and apostles tackled this particular issue that faced them at the time. And I say, not so much in detail, because I don't think it's a live issue for us, but look at the sort of approach they took to it.

And then, in the light of that, we could ask the questions, what approaches to unity might work today? So first of all, does church unity actually matter?

[8 : 56] And if so, why does it matter? One might start thinking, well, it's over 300 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch, and Jerusalem is a Jewish city with a Jewish culture.

Antioch is a Gentile city with a very multicultural ambience. Why not let them just do their own thing? Why not let the two churches develop naturally in their own way?

You know, there are cultural differences, and those cultural differences are going to cause us problems. So, why don't we just not worry about them? Why not let themselves, embed themselves, as we might say nowadays, contextualise themselves in their culture in a sort of natural way, and not worry about trying to maintain unity at all?

Well, I quoted Ephesians 4 verse 3 earlier, let me just remind you the next part of that quotation, where Paul writes, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Why complicate matters by insisting there is one faith and one church and one Lord? Well, the answer that Paul gives here is because there is one faith, one church and one Lord.

[10 : 36] So, let's unpack that a bit. There's one faith and I think clearly Paul means here not so much the act of faith but faith in the sense of there is one body of things that we believe.

excuse me. So, we could describe that perhaps as a unity of message and that was what the problem was in Antioch as we see if we look at chapter 15 verses 1 and 2.

There was a different message being taught by these people from Jerusalem and by what Paul and Barnabas were teaching and that needed to be sorting out and the world looks at the church today doesn't it and it jeers at us and says how can you say that Jesus is the only way to God when your message is packaged in so many different ways and with so many different brand names and yet you say Jesus is the only way.

this shouldn't be so but regrettably it is but we have made some progress perhaps of this and later I'll come back to that but the first thing is there is and there must be one message any unity that is not a unity about preaching the same gospel is not a unity worth having and secondly there is one church and we might describe that as a unity of welcome you'll notice in verse 4 that the when Paul and Barnabas and the others came to Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders to whom they reported everything that God had done through them if I go to a church on the other side of the world somewhere I would expect that they're probably going to speak a different language I would expect them perhaps to have different modes of dress I would expect them to sing different songs maybe different patterns of worship different ways they organise their worship services and possibly to some extent there might even be differences of lifestyle and patterns of behaviour and yet if I go to a church on the other side of the world I should expect to be welcomed they might offer me a glass of wine they might offer me a coca cola or they might offer me just water but whatever hospitality I'm offered I should expect to feel at home I think that's the point there is one church if there is one church then the fellowship is for the whole church and actually to some extent we do find this is true don't we when we travel abroad and go to a church which is maybe a different culture a different language then often we do find we're surprisingly at home yes of course there are some things that are different but we recognise that they are serving the same Lord that this is they have the love for us that we have for them but sadly one has to say sometimes one feels more welcome in a church a thousand miles away than one does in one ten miles up the road unfortunately that is the case but some shouldn't be and thirdly and really summing up the other two there is one Lord who gives one spirit how can those who own allegiance to the same God in the heart not show it on the outside it says why do you in verses 10 and 11 why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear and so on it's through the grace of our Lord

[14:47] Jesus that we are saved just as they are so if we have all received the same grace if we all acknowledge the same Lord then surely we should be one in spirit but more than that surely that should be something visible you remember speaking of false prophets that one Lord who we honour says thus by your fruit you will recognise them is it really that hard to distinguish good fruit and bad it's not you know you can't say can you really that well they all look the same on the outside but that one's good on the inside and that one isn't it really work like that does it the you know you should be able to see something it should be visible that we that we all serve the same Lord so let's move on a bit and ask a bit about this what exactly is unity well in one sense we've answered that unity is the visible practical and even emotional spiritual demonstration that there is one faith one church and one

Lord but let's again unpack that a bit and say that unity is not just organised it's experienced because it's a unity of the spirit and we could look at Acts 15 verse 1 again and say well actually probably these people who came from Jerusalem actually thought that they were promoting Christian unity they thought they probably came up to Antioch and said look guys you haven't got this quite right you've got to do these things and then we'll all look the same I don't suppose they actually came with mischief really in their minds they probably genuinely believed in the message that they were bringing and yet it was to lead to disunity unity because it wasn't a unity of spirit that they were promoting it was actually just a unity of an external visible conformity to certain rules and practices in the end that makes no sense and the result far from bringing unity was a sharp dispute as we read in verse 2 and too often the church has made that mistake hasn't it in the late 20th century there was something called the ecumenical movement and the world council of churches I suppose it still exists though you don't seem to hear much about it nowadays but that tried to pretend that pretty much any organisation which claimed the name Christian could be included and tried to reach some sort of organisational unity on that basis one of their slogans was growing into unity which I suppose does acknowledge that unity is not just organisation but they tried to work at it

from the outside in I was brought up actually in a liberal congregational church not an evangelical one and the minister there believed that we could have unity just on the basis of belief in the trinity that's the only thing he would insist on as a basis for unity was a belief in the trinity and I suspect that even that might have been a bit strong for some of the proponents of ecumenism you cannot create unity just by asserting it it's got to reflect something real and of course the Roman Catholic church and particularly at the time of the reformation but they failed to understand this and tried to impose order by force they tried to say that you've got to believe what we say whether you really do or not you've just got to conform to the words the Anglican approach I think is exactly the opposite of that but they also make the mistake of perhaps thinking that unity is not a spiritual thing and just as some examples about this everyone knows that the Anglicans communities are disunited over issues like women bishops or homosexuality but there seems little you notice there seems little attempt to address the actual issue what you find is they look for some compromise that will hold the administrative structure together well the

Anglicans have really been doing that for the last 350 years I suppose you have to say they've succeeded so far but but the problem is that you land up with such a diluted message that well I mean you look at well no I'll come back to that you can't achieve unity by negotiation not in that sense compromise because you land up being united in name only in organisation only not in any real sense at all Christian unity is unity of the spirit but of necessity therefore it proceeds from the inside out but that's not to say that no intervention is required clearly it is and Paul and Barnabas and the leaders of the Antioch church soon realised that they needed to take action they couldn't just let things slide they needed to go and sort this out go and meet with the

[20 : 44] Jerusalem church and sort it out and so that's what they did notice that they weren't prepared to declare themselves independent they weren't prepared to set themselves up in competition to Jerusalem although they could very easily have done that in the last resort perhaps if the gospel is at stake then this might be unavoidable but it has to be a last resort I think that we should maybe be making every effort to preserve the unity of the spirit not just within the local church but within the universal the global church any sort of going up into competition or even shaking the dust off your feet as it were has to be a last resort I think so the Paul and Barnabas and some other believers go up to Jerusalem to sort this issue out and they get a good reception from the elders and apostles in Jerusalem and they tell how indeed the grace of

Christ has been preached among the Gentiles and as it said how the Gentiles have been converted and we read that this made all the brothers very glad well that's a good start isn't it you might have thought that it would be like some of the other Jews who weren't glad at all the Gentiles were turning to Christ but still there was a problem there there was something that had to be sorted out and so they have a public debate Paul and Barnabas put their case and then in verse five the opposition party are invited to put their case this isn't an issue that's kind of imposed covered up on the contrary it's exposed to public gaze so that everybody can see exactly what the issues are and why they're important and what we can do about it so how did the apostles actually tackle it I think you can divide this passage up into two bits first of all and we must start there they start with a theological analysis of the problem and that's what we find in verses eight to nineteen Paul or whoever is speaking here reminds the whole church that the prophets had indeed promised the gospel would be extended to the Gentiles and the fact that Paul had been commissioned to proclaim this and the fact that the spirit had authenticated it indicated that this promise was being fulfilled but even so it's not just the testimony of Paul and Barnabas that is accepted it has to be put you know let's check this let's check it from the scriptures let's make sure we understand what's really going on here theologically it needs to be put into a theological context to make sure that this isn't a lying spirit as John says test the spirit not every spirit is the holy spirit so the spirit does have to be tested and that's why they start with this theological analysis of the situation but then the apostles also understand that not everything is a theological issue or at least that some things are not as important as others there is also room on the theological basis there has to be absolute unity because otherwise it's never going to work you're actually preaching a different gospel on matters other matters there is some room for cultural accommodation it's essential that the two churches should remain united in spirit it's essential that they have the same message that they view each other as both sharing in the same task that they view each other as being branches of the same operation not rival concerns but in other respects one can allow some flexibility and I think this is how we should read verses 19 and 20 if this was meant as a sort of actual explanation of what is

the basis of the gospel that we should agree on then it doesn't make any sense does it verses 19 and 20

I mean it's all about grace at all really but I think the point they're making is that in verse 19 well it says explicitly doesn't it we shouldn't make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God by putting arbitrary conditions on them but verse 20 is saying okay but we shouldn't make it difficult for the Jews either by just doing things that are going to offend them there is some room for a bit of accommodation here if I'm inviting a brother or sister from a Jewish background to a meal I shouldn't be using my liberty in the gospel as an excuse to feed them meat which could raise an issue of conscience either feed them pork or perhaps something that had been offered to idols or as it mentioned here something with blood in it that they're going to find at least unpleasant so I don't think this is a prescription of saying that you shouldn't eat black pudding

I don't think that's the point it's about accommodating people's weaknesses if you like because it doesn't really matter we don't have to eat meat with the blood in it if it's going to offend our guests then we won't put it in a more modern context perhaps I personally will drink wine as most people here know I'm not tea total but if I know I have a guest who I know or even suspect might not drink alcohol I'm neither going to offer it to them or indeed even drink in their presence because it could give them offence I'm going to be careful about things like that I will not serve out of respect for their conscience so I think this verse 20 is about accommodation and when you think about that it is worth pausing about this reference to immorality sexual immorality because that does seem slightly out of place here at first

[28 : 01] I mean why is bothering to write that I mean surely no church that Paul and Barnabas are the leaders of is going to be tolerating sexual immorality are they most unlikely why does why do they feel the elders and apostles feel the need to write this into their letter so it's worth thinking a little bit about that I think because what is the Greek word the Greek word is pornea which does refer to sort of deviant sexual behaviour but it's actually as I think Phil told us at one time it's quite a broad word it can mean lots of different things almost any form of sexual deviance or sexual immorality and I might given that the rest of this sentence the other things are about eating about food about guests inviting guests I'd suggest to you that possibly that's particularly what the elders are focusing on here now how can we make sense of that and it might be something to do with

Roman interior decoration and seating plans is one possibility I might suggest to you even a hint of Greco-Roman sexual mores would be offensive to Jews we know actually from verses like Acts 11-29 where they took a collection for the Jerusalem church or from Acts 13-1 where we know that at least one of the leaders of the Antioch church was an aristocrat some of the people in the Antioch church were doubtless prosperous Romans or Greeks and a prosperous Roman or Greek would own a villa and their rooms would be decorated with frescoes and if you can face it have a look on the internet at some of those frescoes were like lots of them have survived in Pompeii that's it yes thanks a lot of them survived in

Pompeii they often showed nudeness nakedness and sometimes they actually described sexual activity as such it's possible that some of the Romans or Greeks might say well that is just what we have on our walls that's just the trendy thing to have it may be they didn't even take it very seriously or mean much by it but that was certainly going to be offensive to any Jew who came into the house those what what about seating arrangements Roman and Greek seating arrangements I think would have put men and women not necessarily husbands and wives together in the seating plan would have been scandalous to some Jews and again if you think about it in these terms you realise that they can still be live issues today I mean we would crowd men and women around a dining table or on a sofa in a way that we westerners wouldn't really think much of we just do that but it could be uncomfortably provocative to those from some cultures and to see that you've only got to look at the problems that the Germans are having with their refugees and these things that happened on New Year's Eve what is normal in one culture is provocative in another culture and let me just give you one example we need to be careful about the paintings and photographs on our walls it's quite easy to offend people without meaning to let me give you one example of this from some time ago when I was sort of late teens and early well in my teens and early twenties

I used to help run crusader camps on the Norfolk Broads sort of Christian holiday camps and the crusaders were one well the Norfolk Broads crusader camps was one of the first one of the earliest to go mixed to have both boys and girls originally they were used to run separate camps for boys and girls but Norfolk Broads was actually one of the first ones to go mixed and one day there were

sailing camps but one day for some reason we weren't sailing I think it must have been probably there was no wind or something and so we decided instead to go to the beach and go swimming which we did and one of the boys took a photograph of the swimming party on the beach and one of the photographs happened to show one of the female leaders was wearing a bikini now I don't think anybody had you know we're on the beach we're swimming it's a swimsuit I don't think either the lady herself or any of the other leaders had thought anything of this and yet when that boy took that photograph home and showed it to his parents one of them complained one of them had been offended by it it is much easier to offend people than you actually realise just without thinking about it but I think I should also make the point that what we're talking about here is not political correctness it depends on a culture of mutual respect for each other's liberty in Christ if you go down the route of not offending anyone under any circumstances you soon discover as our government is indeed discovering now that you'll end up having to ban everything because everything is going to offend somebody at some time so we're not talking political correctness here we're talking cultural sensitivity let's you know let's when we meet with other Christians from a different culture from a different way of looking at things let's share our mutual liberty in Christ you know not go out of our way to offend each other but at the same time you know show tolerance for things

I mean they didn't really mean to do that that upsets me you know they didn't really mean to upset me so it's a two-sided thing we need first of all to make an effort not to offend our visitors whoever they are if they're brothers and sisters in Christ but equally we shouldn't be too picky either ourselves we need to remember that there are differences people do things differently and sometimes we just have to put it aside and so they didn't really mean to offend me over that so that's a bit of a discussion of what how the apostles and elders tackled this so just to summarise that on the theological centre they were absolutely clear because they had to be if there was one faith one church one Lord there has to be one message but at the same time on other issues there could be accommodation and you just think of the things that might upset people

[35 : 29] I say these are I think actually all about eating together which we saw from that quotation from Galatians it was the particular problem that some of the Jews were not prepared to eat with the Gentile believers in Antioch so that was then what about now what approaches to unity might work today and again I want to just emphasise again that unity is not an option just because we're not very good at it doesn't mean it's something we can ignore I mean the Christian life doesn't work like that does it I mean it's not the case of ten commandments attempt only eight you know it's anything that the Lord commands we've got to take seriously unity is essential and it is true that Christian unity proceeds from the spirit and is firstly internal that is true but it's so often evangelicals particularly have made that of an excuse they said yeah well we're all one in Christ really the fact that we don't look like it doesn't really matter but it does matter the unity needs to be displayed visibly so how do we do that do we impose it from outside as the Roman Catholic church tries to do well we saw you see what happens if you do that you land you know your leaders are never perfect and you simply gradually drift away from the true apostolic doctrine you know even by claiming apostolic succession you drift away from apostolic doctrine so that doesn't work you can't impose it by denominational rules as it were and is the does the

Anglican approach a sort of endless compromise work somebody once said of the Anglican church that it's so broad that nobody from the Pope to Mousy Tongue can be sure he's not an Anglican but as I say they've kind of done it for 350 years but if you look at the state of the Anglican church now what do you see you see that the center is dying broad church Anglicanism is a dead duck really only on the extremes on the wings amongst the Anglican Catholics and the Evangelicals otherwise the people who actually believe something is there any progress is there any actual you know well those are the only churches that aren't empty the ones that do actually believe something because why are people going to turn up to church to hear a message that doesn't tell them anything different to what they could get off their

TV it's not worth the effort is it why would they bother we must have if we just try and work by compromise then soon we shall be so the message will be so thin as to be non-existent and what is going to work and we have to say really we've got too much history haven't we and too much hurt we've got too much commitment to our traditions and practices I don't think there is a magic wand that's going to put it all back together if there was then undoubtedly somebody would have waived it by now it's a continuing problem and as even the fix that the council of Jerusalem presented was

not without its problems it didn't instantly solve everything as if we read on in Acts and in some of Paul's letters we find that there were still struggles over these issues but I would say that there are hopeful signs too because I suppose somebody said nothing concentrates the mind so much as the knowledge one is to be hanged in the morning the fact that

Christianity has declined in the West has at least focused minds on the issues and there are some hopeful signs at least among evangelicals to try and work towards unity but even that has not been a total success the evangelical alliance in Brighton at least really has not flown may work better in other places I don't know but in Brighton the mere label evangelical turned out not to be enough in the end where there was no unity of spirit now I'm not sniping at the evangelical alliance as such they spawned the tier fund which I think in many ways is a genuinely unifying organisation but the way it worked in Brighton frankly didn't work very well because even to just have the label evangelical even actually just to have an evangelical basis of faith doesn't really unite people because you interpret it to mean what you want it to mean very often it means different things to different people so is there any hope at all well I think I would actually say that there is and I think for instance the innovation which is really a 21st century innovation of the gospel partnerships the one we belong to of course is the

Sussex gospel partnership and I do think that's a hopeful sign actually it's small in sense it doesn't even cover all evangelicals by any means but at least it's a start and how does it work it's not a common denominator approach what's the least common denominator we could all sign up to it actually starts in a different place it says excuse me it says let's start with spirit rather than with the doctrinal position as such church and I've deliberately on the slide there put a spiritual unity with capital s let's start with a spiritual unity that we have and proceed from there but then say well it's got to be some sort of unity of purpose so let's say we'll start with those churches that share our view of that evangelism should be by preaching and teaching the word share our view perhaps in one or two other things about church services but quite minimal of things I mean in many ways there's a broad range of actual practice across the gospel partnerships but there is a unity of spirit that unity that the way forward is to preach the word teach the word not anything else that other people are suggesting might be the way forward and then when you proceed from that of course you've still got to have theological agreement to make it work you can't just say let's all be nice to each other that doesn't work but if you start from that approach you approach the theological basis of faith from a different direction the basis of faith becomes a way of expressing our unity rather than trying to put a boundary around things that can't really live together sometimes a basis of faith is like trying to herd cats it just doesn't work but if a basis of faith is really a creed in the original sense of the word something in which we agree on as an expression of what we are about like the catechism perhaps that

[44 : 20] Phil has been teaching us in the mornings it's not offence it's a statement of agreement these are the things that we agree on and they are the key and fundamental things it expresses that unity in the spirit that's already there rather than trying to impose unity by a least common denominator of doctrine and I would suggest to you this does seem more in line with the approach of Acts 15 they say yes the grace has been extended to the Gentiles therefore we are unified in spirit now let's make that work by sorting out the theology of it and it works surprisingly well I think I think the Sussex Gospel Partnership which is the one I have most experience of works surprisingly well you know there are the biggest churches most of the big churches are

Anglican churches there are a few bigger FIEC churches but most of the big churches are Anglican churches from quite a broad range I mean not the total expanse of evangelical Anglicanism but they're certainly not all exactly the same they're not all St.

Helen's clones or anything like that and yet the main teachers on the training course are in fact independents Nick McQuaker is a FIEC from FIEC background and John Hobbs is actually a lapsed Anglican he was an Anglican vicar I think wasn't he he was an Anglican vicar and felt he could no longer stay within the Anglican communion and yet the evangelical Anglicans are prepared to send their people along to be trained by these two independents because there is a mutual trust there when they do come up against differences they will be sensitive there will be cultural sensitivity and say look to be honest we don't quite agree on this particular issue here's both sides of the case but that does at least open the debate it does say that maybe we can grow into unity

I don't think there's anything wrong with the slogan growing into unity it was just the way it was used by the ecumenical movement maybe we can grow into unity because these differences become

stimulus to mutual cost fertilization rather than things that drive us apart none of us possess the whole truth but as we work and teach together we will start to converge I think that's the way that's what you find in practice and then actually if you start thinking on these terms one considers how one might spread the net a little wider talking to churches that are not gospel partnership members and certainly in Haywards Heath they've actually started thinking about this talking for instance to New Frontiers churches I mean not very far away attempting the impossible but churches that are slightly different in culture and attitude and are beginning to work together with the New Frontiers church in Burgess Hill so I would suggest to you that this well let me say first of all is unity important yes does it matter yes but it's not easy we can't impose it we can't negotiate it and even trying to sort of impose it by a basis of faith or something doesn't really work it doesn't quite work but if we can start with a spiritual unity and then find how to express that formally perhaps we can make progress there's an awful long way to go isn't there but perhaps we can really put right what has been wrong really for 2000 years we can perhaps make some progress in the right direction so that's the external unity unity between different churches that's possibly the easier of the two the things that can grow up within a church are what we are looking at next week perhaps the trickier problem or certainly the most painful one the more painful one so there wasn't really any other choice of him that I could make after that sermon rather than 579 ending