

One in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] What are we talking about today? The vision of Christchurch. The vision at Christchurch. The vision that you guys all know way better than I do, because I've only been here for eight months, right?

Who's been here since, is it 2005, when the partnership was official? The LEP began? Put your hand up if that was... Yeah, okay, so that's interesting, a real mixed bag.

Actually, that's quite exciting as well, because there was a lot of people who didn't put their hands up. Which is a good fruit sign, right? That's awesome. As you may imagine, by the fact that they're not here, Russell and Clive have taken the opportunity to go on holiday, and they've decided that the most naive, inexperienced, in every way, person would be doing the first of your series on the vision that they have been championing for however many years.

So apologies if everything I say now, Clive and Russell, that's the correct next week. But it's their fault for not being here to check it, right? So the cards have been handed out over the past few weeks.

And if you're new, basically the vision is quite simple. It's that we would be one in Christ, that we would grow more disciples, and we would serve the community. And in that order, that we would be one in Christ, grow more disciples, and serve the community.

[1 : 2 7] Often when somebody starts a series, they tend to do as an introduction the entire series, leaving everybody else to try and work out what they can actually say about their week.

I'm not going to do that. I'm just going to talk about our first point. What does it mean to be one in Christ? And we're going to use Ephesians 4 as a guide, as a bit of a structure, to kind of find some goodies about what us at Christchurch should be aiming for, what this means to be one in Christ.

So Paul, in his letter, he begins, well, he begs actually, if we read it, he begs, that we would lead a life worthy of the calling to which we, they, have been called.

Paul, he kicks off big here.

He tells us that the Spirit has already actually made us one. But then he has this little second point, that we are to maintain it, that we are responsible for the depth of that oneness.

[2 : 4 3] So we need to remember that when we talk about being one. Actually, we are already one. We are already one. But there's work to do.

Because this kind of oneness is the kind of oneness, according to Paul, that matches the one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is in everything.

The oneness that Paul seems to be talking about is one like God is one. We at the church are meant to be one to that sort of degree.

Not just friendly, compliant, playing safe with surface level relationships, but one like my physical body is supposed to be one. Many parts working together, and when one stops working, the rest of the body suffers.

That's the sort of oneness that he's talking about. And like I said, our tagline, technically, Christ has already sorted it for us.

[3 : 53] We can say, yeah, we're one in Christ. Yeah, we're one in Christ. Jesus did that. But there's this nasty little word in that passage, maintain. Maintain.

So dull. I don't know about you, but when I hear the word maintain, I think of grass cutting. Make sure it doesn't get too long, not too short, just right, so it looks good in the pictures.

Or maybe like, you know, you maintain a car. You know, you take it for an annual service. Is it still going to run? You know, no leaks? Yeah, it's all sort of there. It's pretty dirty, but you know, the basics work.

Yeah, we're maintaining. To me, that's what I hear when I hear that word maintainer. I don't quite think that's what Paul means. We're meant to do with the church. Maintain it.

In that way. I think what he's talking about is hard work. And he thinks it's us. So it says, I've written here, the part that we couldn't do to make us one has been done.

[4 : 58] Christ has accomplished that on the cross and in the resurrection. And now we, the body, are one, made in and through Christ. But the oneness is on us.

The depth of the oneness is our responsibility. The maturity of our oneness is on us. How are we supposed to do that?

I think Paul preempted that question. I can imagine the first hearers listening to those words and looking around at everyone going, really? That guy?

There could be one with them? That one? They were a prostitute last week and now they're in here sat at the front? Can you imagine the kind of reality, the mixed bag of the first church?

church. And Paul's writing to them saying, you're meant to be one with them. I don't want you to look around now but I'm sure if you did you might feel similar. I know people look at me and often think that.

[5 : 58] So, Paul is, Paul's caught us. He said, we're meant to be one. And we've gone, how on earth are we supposed to do that? And he's gone, with the gifts that God has given you.

According to the measure of Christ's gift in each of us, we've been given the gifts. God has come down. He has shown us what we need to do. And he's given us all we need.

And we can get a little bit lost in gifts and talking about them into detail. What's my gift? What am I going to give? We start getting the rotors out. I'm going to join the prayer team.

I'm going to join the coffee rota. I'm going to cut the grass because I love maintaining grass. You know, we start doing that. But actually, we're going to skip this. We're going to skip the gifts today.

Because you're going to do that later, I think, in your midweek sessions. We have the gifts. We are the gift. The details we can sort out later. I want us to really get a bit deeper on what it means to be one.

[7 : 06] What oneness really looks like. And I wonder what images come to mind when you hear the word one, be one. Maybe teams. We have some great analogies often of football teams and we're meant to be a team like that.

Or family. And we use the word family and we talk about how it's messy. But we are one even though, you know, we haven't talked to our great aunt, blah, blah, because, you know, she said that thing once.

We sort of think oneness like that. Or the caravan club, you know. Well, I've joined and I go every now and again. We're one. I'm part of that group. But only the caravan club know that I'm part of the caravan club.

Oneness isn't about being part of a team. That's true that it is an element of it. It's about unity. It's about you becoming us, I becoming we.

It's the difference between where before I was in Christ, I was just me. And now in Christ, I'm no longer that. I'm part of the we who believe.

[8 : 18] Belonging in him and belonging as us. Living for each other as one body that can only truly function as such. We get what's being asked of us, right?

Have you ever believed so strongly in a cause that it took over your every day? Your thoughts, your actions, your words. Being one is when that thing becomes bigger than I am.

More important than me. That thing, that unity becomes my primary focus when I gather. My first port of call isn't what do I do?

What do I think about this? It's about what's going on in the we. So this vision at Christchurch isn't fluffy. I'm sorry. It's not as light as it can sound when it's so nicely put.

You know, one in Christ. This oneness is not aiming to run a cake sale without puff pastry being thrown at each other or getting through another service without another fallout. Those things are good to aim for but it's much deeper than that.

[9 : 29] This vision is about seeking to achieve an unbreakable oneness so we will grow. Not in number but in Christlikeness.

Next week the preacher will deal with what growth in numbers look like. But what about the growth of the Christlikeness of this church? When people look at us will they see that?

They see a lovely community group which is nice. But is that what Jesus died for? I'm not sure. The kind of unity that we're talking about is actually very specific on Jesus' heart.

He prays for it in John 17. He prays that they would be one as you and I Father are one. Whoa. Whoa. Let that one sink in.

That they we would be one as Jesus and the Father are one. I wonder what that looks like. I've got a little clip just to break the heaviness.

[10 : 38] Yes, exactly. That's what I always say. It's like, God, you get me. Well, you're an easy guy to get. I can't go home. He's probably waiting for me. I mean, he's going to be my boss.

He's the younger brother. How old is he? 42. Same. My younger brother's 42 also. Same. I mean, 32.

32. 32. 32. Same. Same. Same. I was going to say, I was thinking the same. You thought 32 and then he said 32. That's so insane. Crazy. Do you want a glass of wine?

I love wine. Red wine? I love red wine. Same. It's like too same. That's insane. It turns out the guys had tons in common. That's so weird.

Like, the last time I went scuba diving? Wow. I'm eating Captain Clash.

[11 : 37] Same. Sorry. I think so often, like, I love that scene. It's so often when we talk about being one and unity, we start thinking, oh no, I've got to be a clone.

I've got to be able to be the same as that person. And we've got to like the same things and we've got to agree on everything. And, you know, I just love that scene. Because so often I think we actually try and do that in church.

Like, we, and from the front, I think there are the leaders and I'm sure I've been guilty of that, especially as a youth worker, where my agenda was to bring this group of people together to look like something that I can say, yes, that's exactly it.

And you have said the same thing as you, so you guys are definitely functioning properly. This guy over here, he doesn't like this, so he's not there yet. And there's this sort of oneness means that we basically start becoming sheep of something, and we just get boring.

And it just looks like that, it's hilarious. You know, people aren't interested in the church, because a lot of the time that's what they think, that they leave themselves at the door, and they come and they be the same, 42, 32, that was, I was going to say 32, that's what I meant, we are actually the same, let's maintain this fake thing.

[13 : 00] That's clearly not oneness. If that was oneness, that's an unrealistic aim. And it's not actually a sign of unity.

You find that kind of thing in a social media echo chamber. You find it a lot in cults as well, actually. You should be careful of that. If we start to look like that, we need to ask some questions.

That unity that we're seeking, that Christ has called us to be, is not sameness. It's a biblical oneness.

And Paul goes on, he says, we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro, and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness, and deceitful scheming.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament, with each gift equipped, and each part working properly, promotes the growth, building itself up in love.

[14 : 12] love. There's something about growing up, that oneness is about growing up, not sameness, it's about growing up together, finding ways to be knitted together, where we still are, are different people, with our different skills.

Oneness, according to Paul, is when the church, full of difference, and variety of gifts and skills, diverse in all ways, is working together for the glory of God.

It's when the church is not divisive, full of deception and infighting, but full of love. It is when we follow the example of the one who by his love has already made us one.

This is the point I really want to get clear, hit home for you, and I want you to take it home. Love. We will deepen our oneness as we love each other.

We are one, we've been made one in Christ, but we will deepen our oneness as we love each other. The oneness we are seeking that we offer our different gifts to is bound together by a thick, tangible love that breaks down the barriers of irreconcilable differences and deeply ingrained my way and my kindisms.

[15 : 49] It's not something we can partially opt into. This love modelled for us in Jesus perfectly, his death and resurrection. Real love.

love. And it's that kind of real love that we need to develop our oneness. We are called to aim towards something bigger, something of the agape, and to offer that to each other.

That unconditional love that compelled perfection to enter into our broken world, willing to be broken so that we the broken could be made perfectly whole.

This love that deepens the oneness is far better than any collection of skills could be. It's not passive, it's not cute, it's hard work and can be messy.

Now I'm not really a gardener, but if you are a gardener and I get this wrong, apologies, but I think it's a little bit like manure for a rose.

[17 : 07] It stinks, but it's worth it because for embracing the muck, you get the beauty. Or if you're a gym member, which I used to be, as you can see it's not so true anymore.

Have you ever used a TENS machine? Now if you, this is a popular thing, I've had four kids so I definitely know this, it's a popular thing during birth and stuff, but actually I remember when they first got popular and people, anyone, would use them, but generally it only would work if you were already really skinny, and then you'd put it on and it would make you look really tough, but it was all surface level stuff, it was shallow, you looked like you were strong, you had the muscles because the machine did all the work for you, but you actually weren't any stronger, you just looked the part.

The real love that I'm talking about, the real love that I think we are needing in this church, in the church, is much more like a bench press.

So if you've ever done a bench press, you know the point is you try and lift the heaviest weight possible, make the most amount of noise and get hurt. Like you're not working out if you don't hear the screams in the gym.

Like that bench press is meant to be hard work because you only actually build strength by ripping the muscles. The TENS machine makes you look great, yeah look at that six pack, I've never actually had one but I hear they exist.

[18 : 38] The bench press rips the muscles so that they grow back stronger. It's real strength. And I think that that's what we need to seek for is a bench press kind of love.

Real love. We're good at the TENS machine love. All of us are and it's not a criticism of Christchurch, it's humanity. We are good at surface level love.

When it's okay to give you love because I'm safe, there's no risk to me. That's TENS machine love. We're called for the bench press.

And now you're thinking like I am, how on earth are we going to achieve that sort of oneness? No one does it, right?

Not really. And you're looking at me and I can be honest right now and say there are people who just know how to break my niceness. You know?

[19 : 39] There are people who just know how to make me snap. And there are people who are just annoying. Like it doesn't matter how much you try, they just annoy you.

And I'm that person to somebody else, to other people. And yet I'm called in Christ to find some kind of deepness and oneness of love that just transforms that.

love that. It breaks that barrier. What I'm not saying is that trying to achieve this unity, this oneness, is about ignoring our feelings.

And I'm not saying that you should feel bad or guilty that you have those feelings for other people. We are human, we are not perfect, that is normal stuff. I mean I'm annoyed at Laura, my wife, all the time because she never listens to me.

And she's annoyed at me all the time because I never listen to her. But we are loving and we love each other and we grow. We're not wrong for having those feelings, it's human, right?

[20 : 52] And the fruit is in the deepness of the relationship. So what I'm really wanting to stress here is oneness is not about surface level stuff. But we really do have to push past that barrier.

Christ didn't die for us to have mutual disdain for each other. Can you imagine that? Jesus on the cross. I do this so that you may say hello on a Sunday morning.

Really? He broke barriers that were unbreakable. He broke the veil between us and God because of our sin.

He broke the veil between us, me and you. The aim is to get to the oneness that Jesus has with the Father. Wow.

We settle so often, I settle so often for that mutual disdain. God, forgive me. Forgive me for cheapening the cross to that.

[22 : 02] Yeah. We could spend ages in this passage and you're probably thinking I already have spent ages in it. But let's move on.

Paul, right at the start, he gives us some practical actions. He begs that we, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, would bear with one another in love, make every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

peace. I just want us to think about these three oneness elements. Our oneness will deepen if we approach each other with all humility.

We need to get humble. And when we hear the word humble, I wonder about you. But it quite easily sits with the meek and mild picture.

You know, Jesus sat with the lambs having a cuddle, or just people smiling all the time, the dentist posters, this sort of like, everything's lovely, I'm so humble.

[23 : 19] But interestingly, and I apologize if I've used this analogy before, but Moses, in the Bible, is apparently a very humble man. In fact, he says of himself, now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else, on the face of the earth.

A bit like Donald Trump, isn't it? I'm the most, most humblest to earth. But actually, this is a really odd hit to us when we think about humility, because Paul's referring to Moses as his kind of humbleness, his humility, because when we actually look at Moses' life, that line, out of context, we miss the point.

Moses was willing to take all the hits. Moses was willing to put himself in harm's way, to go alone to an emperor, and say, let my people go, to go speak even though he had a stutter.

He was willing to take the hits for the people of Israel. He was insulted, he was betrayed, but as long as Israel achieved the goal of reaching the promised land, that was fine.

That level of humility, that letting go of me, my, and I as the priority, and seeking the good of the other, seeking the oneness of the body, seeing God's plans fulfilled, for the church its oneness.

[24 : 54] So our oneness will deepen if we get humble. And our oneness will deepen if we approach each other with gentleness.

So hand in hand with gentleness is humility. They go together really naturally, don't they? Because one is about the other, and one is about the approach of the other being first.

So I used that analogy earlier of the muscles. muscles. But loving each other isn't quite as harsh as that. We must carry gentleness.

Not dragging people into our world and our views, but opening up our worlds, and being willing to enter other peoples. Something about gently becoming vulnerable.

It's a word we're scared of. It's a word we keep being told we're meant to not have. Vulnerability is a bad thing. And again, as a youth worker, vulnerability was like a thing we had to protect against.

[26 : 00] In many ways, that's very important. But on the flip side, actually, vulnerability is normal. It's that taking that step of faith. When you don't quite know what's going to happen, putting yourself in that sort of vulnerable position.

So it's about gentleness. Oneness comes, deepens in our gentle vulnerability, entering into each other's worlds, being willing to see the other's view, being willing to see things differently.

And this is kind of the main bit. If we love each other, right, if we're humble and gentle, our oneness will deepen. That's what Paul says.

But there's that word in there that we can never forget. We also need patience. We live in the Instagram world, the instant message, the prime delivery, the swipe right till you find what you like world.

And if any of that was lost on you, ask someone who's been on their phone for most of this talk and they'll explain what I'm talking about. We live in an instant world. But how often do great movements crumble because they couldn't wait any longer for results?

[27 : 26] Loving towards oneness, it takes time. It's about breaking through barriers that actually is so much easier to leave up. It's about getting past people's stubbornness.

And their self-centeredness and my self-centeredness and seeing us under Christ and in Christ as something far more significant. But we're trying to do that in a world that says, well, I think first that must be right.

Well, I don't like that. I'm going to go there. I want that to change because it's not the way I would do it. That's the world we live in. And yet, this oneness that we're called to is so much messier than that.

It's where we acknowledge all of those views, but we seek a new thing together. This in Christ thing, this church and light and dark places thing, this thing that the world doesn't see that many similarities with, actually.

When the world can look at us and think, yeah, I get that, yeah, it's nice, it's a bit like this and that, that worries me. Because what they should say is, why on earth are you chatting to that person?

[28 : 39] And why do you do things that way when you're like that? The church should be something groundbreaking in the world. And that's what it means to be one, is to be groundbreaking in a world where there's division, is to find true oneness, not sameness, oneness.

We need patience, we need to be humble, we need to be gentle, and we need that love, that real love, being willing to support each other, to enter into oneness with each other, with that love that resembles Christ for us.

After all, he did it for us, and we didn't deserve it. Shouldn't we do the same for each other? Our vision is to be one in Christ, to see oneness in Christ, lived out in our living as the church together, through our loving each other.

And so I'll leave you with this thought, where do you, where do we, where do I, need to invest love into Christ's church to bring about that deeper oneness?