

## The Cost of Unity

Latimer Fellowship of New Zealand 2014 AGM Address  
Rev. Dave Clancey, Chairman.

It is a general principle of the Scriptures that in living the Christian life we treat others the way we have been treated. “As I have loved you, so you must love one another,” said our Lord (Jn. 13:34). Jesus himself is our example, our guide as to how we have been treated, and therefore how we are to treat others. The apostles whom he called were called to model themselves on Jesus and in that they were to be living embodiments of the gospel that had been entrusted to them. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.

But the Christian life is far more than simply ‘follow the leader’ or ‘Simon (Peter) says’. In living the way our Lord has commanded and modeled to us we are displaying the very character and nature of the God who has called and saved us. Our Christian lifestyle, our behaviour is, or should be, an expression of the character, the very nature, of the God who has made us his own – who has called us into communion with himself. The apostle Paul wrote, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Col. 3:13). Or as Peter said, “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.” (1 Peter 1:15). Our existence gives expression to the character of the God who has saved us. For in calling and saving us God unites us, by his Spirit, with himself in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Our behaviour then, is an expression of our being – and an expression of the very being of God himself. For God acts towards us as an expression of who he is; his mercy, love, grace and forbearance are demonstrated in the saving work of Jesus. As we put our faith in him and are united to him by that faith, we then love, show mercy, and bear with each other. By that we are displaying to each other and to the world around us who our God is and what our God is like.

This is seen nowhere more clearly of course than in Jesus’ repeated commands to love one another in John’s upper room discourse – chapters 13-17. We love because God has loved us. And the love that we have for each other is seen as we obey Jesus’ commands – primarily to repent and believe in the Son, and then to love each other as we have been loved. To obey as the Son obeys the Father, to love as the Son loves the Father, to remain in the Son’s love as the Son remains in the Father’s love. We are united in Christ, and therefore necessarily display the character of the one who has saved us and united us to himself.

But there is a third aspect, or justification given in Scripture for our Christian behavior and conduct – that we are to live out what we are spiritually and what we will be physically when Jesus returns. In the death and resurrection of Jesus the *eschaton* – the last days – have started. Indeed, in the death and resurrection of Jesus all of God’s purposes are fulfilled – they are all Yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). There is nothing more to be done, which means we have been made fit for purpose. God’s great redemption plan of restoring those he has created in his image to himself, providing for them to live in fellowship with him and with each other, without sin or fear or death – that has all been completed in Christ. We are, according to the New Testament, new creatures, we are holy, we have been gathered to the heavenly Mt Zion (Heb. 12:22), we have been washed and cleansed and death has been defeated and we are spiritually seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6) – that is our spiritual reality.

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And that spiritual reality is real reality – and therefore, says Scripture – be what you are. We give expression to what we are spiritually and will be physically, even though we have not yet physically received it. We are holy in Christ – because we need to be if we are to have fellowship with him who dwells in unapproachable light – and therefore with him - and so now we live holy lives. We will exist in peace with God and with each other eternally, for we have been made at peace through the death of Jesus, and therefore we now live peaceful lives, for we will live peaceful lives forever. We live out now physically what we are spiritually in Christ.

All three, treating others as we have been treated, giving expression to the character of the God who has joined us with himself, and living out what he has made us – are all of course sides of the same coin – if you could have a three-sided coin. They are different facets of the same jewel, which is our communion with God in Christ. We are family, brothers and sisters, saved by our Lord, to join with him in eternal fellowship. For our good, and for his glory, God has saved miserable sinners like me, and like you, to live without death in the blessed company of the triune God. He has called us into fellowship with himself, the source and perfection of all fellowship, and declares through us who he is and what he is like. A God who out of the eternal abundance of his perfect internal love, loves us the unlovely, and makes us lovely by giving himself in our place, uniting us with himself in his Son, and through that makes us fit to enjoy the pleasures of communion with him forever.

Which leads us, of course, to arguably one of the most prominent commands in the New Testament. To follow the example of Jesus, to give expression to the character of God and to live out what he has made us to be – we as his people are to be united. Our love for one another is predicated upon our unity. Our unity, theologically, is grounded upon the very unity of the Godhead – in his famous blessing of Second Corinthians 13 it is the fellowship of God's Holy Spirit – the *koinonia* in which the Father Son and Spirit exist eternally that the apostle prays for us. The apostle John grounds the fellowship of believers in the gospel which he has proclaimed – in 1 John 1:3 he says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us”. And then he continues, “And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” Our union is grounded upon the very character of the God we serve. Paul's words in the beginning of Ephesians 4 are so well known to us – “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; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” We are united, by virtue of there being only one Lord, by virtue of there being only one way to this Lord (by faith demonstrated in baptism), by virtue of there being only one Spirit who indwells the many who believe.

Christians are united spiritually, we will be united eternally, and therefore we give expression to what we are now. We make every effort to keep that unity – notice that we don't create it, we have it. Our unity is something we give expression to because it is preexistent for the Christian.

It exists by virtue of our union with God himself. To the one who loves and obeys Jesus – who repents and believes, who receives his word, the Lord says – “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn. 14:23).

Therefore to break unity as Christians, is to cut against the very character of God himself. It is to demonstrably damage the apologetic function that the church necessarily has by virtue of what Christ has made us. Listen to these words of Ryle, first bishop of Liverpool –

*“How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion and the weakness of the church. How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending*

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*against their brethren instead of contending against the devil. How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say "When you have settled your own internal differences we will believe". [...] a little later...Let us bear much, concede much, and put up with much before we plunge into secessions and separations. They are movement in which there is often much false fire. Let rabid zealots who delight in sect-making and party-forming rail at us and denounce us if they please. We need not mind them. So long as we have Christ and a good conscience, let us patiently hold on our way, follow the things that make for peace, and strive to promote unity.*<sup>1</sup>

The apostle writes his first letter to the Corinthians, that fractured, fighting church to whom he will have to say some incredibly difficult things, yet he opens with this: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Cor 1:10). Even in Corinth, there must be unity.

And it is upon that basis that I present to you this evening this argument:

That should the General Synod of our church implement the blessing of same-sex relationships as it has indicated it will do through Motion 30, in such a way that evangelical integrity cannot be maintained, then the Latimer Fellowship must be willing to support and encourage the breaking of structural unity with General Synod.

My brothers and sisters I do not say that lightly. While in this company some may regard me as young, seven years of leading a parish has seen the impetuosity of youth slowly fade. I don't want to fight. I certainly don't want to not be Anglican. I am an Anglican to the core – baptised, confirmed, ordained in this church. I am the son of Anglican minister, I have never been a regular worshipper at a church that is not Anglican. My great-great-grandfather built the stone Anglican churches of Banks Peninsula. Not particularly well apparently – most of them have fallen down now. As much as this church frustrates me at times, it is my church. I love her breadth, her order, her prayers, her evangelistic heart and her generous welcome. And yet, should our church through its canonical processes legitimize same-sex activity through blessing, or ordination or marriage, we as a fellowship must be willing to support our members in breaking unity with the structures of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia.

Before I explain why we must do this, let me tell you what this is **not** about. This is not about power, it is not about evangelicals trying to reform or purify the church or set ourselves up in positions of power. But neither is this about homosexuality – there is no 'us' and 'them'. We are all one of 'them' – there is no-one in the church who is not one of 'them'. For we are *all* sinners in desperate need of a Saviour. We are all made in God's image and called by the gospel of Christ to repent and commit ourselves to love and obey Jesus and his word. And each of us will find the call to discipleship easier in some areas and harder in others.

For those attracted to people of the same gender as themselves, that call to discipleship can be incredibly hard. I am grieved that our church has to speak so much about this issue when it is so personal and so private for some people; people who have all too often been the objects of ridicule and jokes (even, to our shame, sometimes by evangelicals); people who are wrestling with deep and powerful feelings, people who live in a world where we and they are all fallaciously told that sexuality is integral to our identity. There is much in Motion 30 that is

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, John Charles, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels. St John Vol. III* (London, James Clarke & Co Ltd, 1957), 221-2.

good, and the apology to people who have been sinned against because of their sexuality is a very good thing. It is not about power. It is not about 'them'.

Should Motion 30 proceed – and we pray it doesn't, and as a fellowship we must work hard to encourage the Way Forward working party, and bishops, and all ministers to hold to what the church has always taught – but should Motion 30 proceed, and same-sex activity be legitimized in our church, we must be willing to support our members who feel they need to break structural unity. Now Motion 30 guarantees that our diversity will be protected as this process carries on. So for us to call the church to maintain her doctrines as we have received them is right and proper – to distance herself from those who claim to be Anglican but do not hold to those teachings is entirely appropriate – that is effectively all that we are doing.

Motion 30 also seeks to provide for structures whereby evangelicals will be able to retain our integrity within the church. I admit there are far larger brains out there than mine, but I for the life of me struggle to see how there can be structural unity where evangelical integrity is protected. For as I have just said, a core part of evangelical integrity is that we must always be calling ourselves to the standards of faith and conduct that the Scriptures reveal to us and that this church has received. And should our church legitimize conduct which is contrary to Scripture, and we are licensed to teach only the doctrines of our church, and we call for, and submit to the canonical authority of our bishops to discipline those who do not teach the doctrines of our church – how can we be one church, that declares homosexual relationships both blessed by God and sinful and to be repented of at the same time. As I said, the Way Forward working party may have a solution, I pray that they might have a way forward, but in my opinion, I cannot see how it will be a way forward that provides for structural unity and for evangelical integrity.

And therefore, if our church legitimizes same sex behavior, we must be willing to support those who must break that structural unity. It is not about power, it is not about them, it is about the gospel. I have drawn a distinction at this point between unity and structural unity. Our unity in Christ is with all who believe in his gospel. And our structures as Anglicans seek to give expression to that theological truth. We, more than many denominations, recognize the importance of the visual that what we do physically action and behaviour declares spiritual truth. We have got it right, that we physically live out who we are in Christ.

Therefore, let me set forth three reasons why, given the unfortunate scenario potentially before us, the Fellowship must support those who break unity with the ACANZP.

Firstly, and most importantly, our **unity is consequential**. The night before he died our Lord prayed for us:

*I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)*

These beautiful and rich verses are often the very first which are drawn on to speak against any form of disunity. Indeed, the quote we read before from Bishop Ryle was from his Expository Thoughts on this very text. And yet if we read it carefully, we see that unity for Jesus is very specific. It is unity through the apostle's message. Unity is a consequence of hearing and believing the gospel. There is a necessary unity for those who believe the

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apostolic gospel – a gospel which the apostle Paul tells the Galatians is the only gospel – should another gospel be brought other than that handed down by the Lord to those he sent as apostles, that other gospel should be rejected – even if an angel from heaven should bring it, it must not be received, and the bearers of that gospel condemned (Gal 1:6-9). The unity we have, the unity we are called to as Christians, is unity that we have in Christ. And it is unity that necessarily comes about as we hear and respond to Christ in the apostles' message, in the teaching of Scripture – that word which the Lord has caused to be written by his Spirit, that word which continues to speak today. That gospel word which says repent and believe and live. This gospel creates unity, for it is by believing Jesus word that we are joined to him. Whoever accepts his words accepts him, whoever receives his gospel, receives the Lord himself. Unity is a consequence of the gospel: of the apostolic gospel. Where there is, however, a different gospel, there is no unity.

Nor should there be. Where the gospel that has been passed on is ignored, or rejected, there is to be no unity. Jesus in Matthew 18 makes clear that the repentant sinner – the one who hears and responds to Jesus' word to repent and believe – they are to be welcomed, to be forgiven over and over and over again 70 times seven. But the unrepentant sinner, the one who will not respond in love and obedience to the word of the Lord, is to be treated as a tax collector or a pagan. The Christian in 1 Corinthians 5 who will not repent of his sexual immorality within the church community is to be handed over to Satan. Now in both cases the ultimate end is so that the unrepentant sinner might be bought to see their sin and repent. Structural unity expresses spiritual unity that has come about because we are united in Christ through hearing and believing his gospel. If a different gospel is held and believed in, then there is no spiritual unity, and therefore our structures must show that. Unity is vitally important, for it gives expression to what we are and to the God who has made us what we are. A gospel which redefines sin – which says that loving, monogamous same-sex relationships are blessed, and therefore homosexual activity does not need to be repented of – that is not the gospel handed down by the apostles. It is a different gospel, and therefore we should not express unity with those who hold and submit to that gospel.

My second reason that we must be willing to support the breaking of structural unity is because our **unity is necessarily evangelistic**. Jesus prayer for our unity in the gospel message is so that the world might know – might believe – that the Father has sent Jesus (John 17:20). As we have seen above, our unity expresses the goal and purpose of God's redemptive plan in Christ: to gather all who will believe in his Son to himself. I cannot tell you the number of times people have said to me that the worst thing evangelicals could do is break unity over this issue because it will show to the world that the church is divided; it will damage our mission, it will weaken us. I believe that Jesus would argue differently. Let us put to one side those who would say that it would only be a matter of time before the promotion of two integrities would change to a "putting up with" those who hold a conservative line, and then ordinations and new appointments would be discerned on their willingness to bless same-gendered partnerships. Let us not assume what might happen. Rather, let us return to the words of Jesus. And let us trust the words of our Lord, that when we hold to the apostles' teaching, when we love Jesus by obeying his word, he will do his work of displaying to the world, through us, his great love. Let us trust that where God's people have stood for the truth of his gospel, he will do his work through them. Let us look throughout church history, let us look to the Wesleyan Methodists in our own country. Let us trust God to do what he has promised through us.

But as well as that, we must have a church where we can call sin what it is: sin. Where those who fall in homosexual sin, and heterosexual sin, and the greedy and idolaters and drunks and liars... Where we can call ourselves and each other 'sinners' – and hear and receive the

free and glorious offer of forgiveness if we will repent and believe. Where we can declare publically and confidently to a world that so desperately needs to hear the truth of God's word, that we are all sinners and Jesus alone can offer forgiveness when we confess our sins to him. Do you see, that to live in a church, to express structural unity in a church, where something is both sin and not sin at the same time is decidedly unloving – deceitful even – to a world that needs God's forgiveness as much as we do.

Lastly, we must be willing to support the breaking of structural unity so that **we might give expression, structurally, to the unity that we do have**. I am an Anglican – we are Anglicans. By choice or just good fortune this is our church. We are happy here – we might not be happy about everything that happens, but we want to be here. But should we be forced to by changes in belief and practice expressed through alterations in our formularies, we must find a way to remain Anglican, to express the unity that we **do** have, to support and care for parishes and priests who cannot submit to the authority of General Synod.

Now it may be that the Way Forward working party comes to this position, and General Synod allows for two distinct and separate ways of being Anglican in these Islands. Speaking personally I unfortunately see that as the only true way forward given the commitment made in Motion 30. And such a distinct and separate structure could quite possibly address all the concerns outlined this evening. But be it provided for us, or if there is no other way and we have to provide it ourselves, we need to have some way of being authentically Anglican in these islands. To be able to support parishes and priests who have already or who will be unable to remain part of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia. To provide a place for parishes and priests who may remain in the national church after General Synod legitimizes same-sex relationships, who would no doubt work tirelessly to declare the gospel in that mixed economy, but who may find after a time that they must leave. There needs to be a place for them. And should it come to it – and please friends, hear my hope that it doesn't come to this – but should a new structure be required, it must be able to do what Anglicans have always done, establish new churches and ministries, proclaim the gospel, care for the poor and declare the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

The address this evening was titled *The Cost of Unity*. Should our church progress the way it has indicated in Motion 30 and in such a way that evangelical integrity cannot be maintained (and hear me again, we pray it doesn't, we pray that we might stay as we are, we do not want, or long for, or encourage division for the sake of it). But should our church decide to change the gospel – because for an evangelical that is what it is – then our unity – our true unity in Christ, our unity formed as a consequence of believing and obeying the apostle's message – that unity will be **costly**. It will cost clergy as they can no longer submit to the authority of General Synod and their bishops must take their licenses. They then must leave their houses, and their church buildings (those of us that have them). It will cost. It will cost us as we are misunderstood, misrepresented: called bigoted, homophobic, unloving, all those things that we're not. Indeed it's because we're *not* those things that we would be willing to count the cost, and yet the names will come. And the accusations will be leveled, and families will be hurt, and friendships will be strained. And we will stand shoulder to shoulder with Christians who have been maligned and attacked for their obedience to Christ throughout the ages. It will cost. It will cost: reputations, money, time, stress. It will cost. Should it happen, and we pray it doesn't, but should it happen, it will cost. But the cost to us to express the unity we have in the gospel of Christ will cost a lot less than it cost the Lord Jesus to create it. And for love of him, and obedience to his word, and the declaration of his glory, no cost is too great.