

Sermon Notes

(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

AS ONE

Michael McKinney, May 13, 2017

Once upon a time the Church of God was characterized by a peculiar oneness. By a oneness that was unique in all of the world. It was strange, inexplicable, uncanny even. It was a head turning, unusual oneness. Rich people, poor people, citizens, priests, freemen, slaves, women, children, and merchants: they all came together around a new idea; a simple idea that unified them.

Think about it. How did they ever get together? They were so diverse. It wasn't natural. But to the outside observer, they seemed to not just get along, but thrive. "I want to know about that," they said. And the gathering grew.

But it wasn't easy. The problem was, in the Roman Empire these people didn't naturally associate with each other. They avoided each other. They were dismissive of each other. Roman society was divided into classes by birth and wealth. Like today, there were distinctions within distinctions. It even mattered how you gained your wealth. At the top of society was wealth based on land. Below that were the merchants.

To the merchants were imputed every conceivable vice. Cicero wrote of the "contemptible merchant's character." If you were a land owner, you didn't tarnish your reputation by associating with them.

Slaves, most women and children were considered inferior. Children were received into society at the will of the head of the family. Putting slave's children to death and the exposure of freeborn infants was common and perfectly legal. If a father didn't want to raise a child, he would expose it outside the house or in a public place. Anyone who wished to could claim it. But many died.

Jewish society was also marked by various classes of people. They were divided by theology, too. Dismissing people not like us is a very human thing to do. Mankind has always emphasized differences. For the Church of God to gather together as they did was truly a remarkable occurrence.

And yet people from various walks of life began to gather together on the Sabbath day. They shared a meal, they were taught and they committed themselves to being the best citizens in the Empire.

And they believed that there was one God and He was spirit, not stone. They believed that a person could actually know where they stood with God. They knew God's laws were leading them to a new heart and a new mind. That God's Holy Days would keep them ever mindful of what God was doing. And they gathered together because they knew that God was doing something brand new.

And for that they would be shunned by a friend. Condemned by the temple. Persecuted by the Empire. But the idea they that brought them together spread because of their oneness. What got people's attention was this peculiar gathering of people who previously had absolutely nothing in common, but yet found something in common that bound them together.

But again, it wasn't easy to do. Then, as now, there were forces at work designed to separate and divide; forces designed to destroy oneness. Like us they didn't naturally gravitate to people who were different from them. Without the action of a supernatural force, oneness might never have happened. But according to Jesus there is more at stake here than we ever could have imagined. In fact, if we get this right—this oneness—everything changes.

Of course, Jesus didn't just talk about this oneness, He modeled it.

People who were nothing like Jesus gathered around him. He associated with people he had no business associating with. He did a favor for a centurion. He shouldn't have even been talking to a centurion. He gave honor to women. He stopped a discussion when interrupted by children in order to include them.

Imagine the day He stopped to eat with a tax collector with His disciples and He asked Matthew to *join* their group—to join their group. It was unheard of because there were sinners and then there were tax collectors. The sinners don't even want to associate with tax collectors. They were so low they were offensive to the sinners. But Jesus engaged them.

Jesus laid the groundwork for this oneness during His ministry, because it is a defining trait of God's character.

Matthew 16:16 (*NIV translation*).

Jesus is outside Caesarea-Philippi in the very northern end of Palestine, beyond the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus asks His disciples what people are calling Him. "Who do people say that I am?"

They told Him that some say, "You are a prophet. Maybe John the Baptist, or Elijah or Jeremiah. They're not sure." So Jesus says, "That's very interesting, but who do *you* say that I am?" Peter jumps right in and says in verse 16:

Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter got it right. Verse 17:

17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood (you didn’t come up with this on your own), but by my Father in heaven.

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

The word “church”, as you know, is a mistake. When Tyndale translated the Bible from Greek to English the word “church” was nowhere to be found because it is not a direct translation of a Greek word. It is a German derivative. The Greek word there—*ekklesia*—means my gathering, my association, my assembly.

So Jesus says, “Upon this rock; upon this foundation I will build a gathering like the world has never seen before. And this group of people will gather around not based on how much money they make or on their status in society. They are going to gather in My name because of what you just said, Peter. You are exactly right. When this group gets together the only thing they may have in common is their belief that I am the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”

And Jesus adds, “And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” What He is saying is that death will not end this gathering I am building. Not your death, Peter. Not your death, James. And not even My death will end this. I will build my gathering out of people who until now had nothing in common; until they discovered, until they believed, that I am the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and all that that implies.

This belief has far-reaching implications. Specifically, it means that there is a Living God. And that He is on His throne, He has a plan and He is working with you and me and eventually with all of mankind because He most deeply wants to reconcile His creation to Him. But it goes deeper than that. This belief requires something of us. It must transform us. It must change us. We must become more like God.

The fact that Jesus stood there before them as the Son of the Living God, makes this point. Jesus revealed a Living God. This was their connection to each other. This is our connection to each other. Jesus prayed for this oneness—this connection. We’ve read this so many times: John 17:20.

Jesus actually prayed for this, which means that it’s not an option. It’s not just nice to have. It is mission-critical to God’s people for a very specific reason, as we will read. It is essential to what God is doing here on this earth. It is essential to the Body of Christ or Jesus would not have made a point of praying for it.

John 17:20 My prayer is not for them alone. (Speaking of the disciples.) I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

You and me. He's praying for us. Jesus could have prayed for anything. He's about to leave them. So He makes a point of praying not just for His disciples, but for the future believers. There are a lot of things He could have prayed for, but He prayed about the future *ekklesia*—the future gathering. And specifically, He prayed for their oneness.

21 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. (That I am the Son of the Living God.)

22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—

He prayed for our oneness. And the reason He prayed for our oneness is because He knew it would be difficult. If it was inevitable, He wouldn't have bothered praying for it. He knew it would be challenging because we are so different and we all have egos. Right?

He prayed, "May **they** also be in us **so that**." "So that" is what is called a *hina clause*. In Greek, it points to the purpose or the result of something. This *hina clause* tells us the purpose of this prayer. So, if we were to ask Jesus, "Why is this such a big deal? What's at stake here?" He would answer by saying that the purpose of My *ekklesia* hangs on your willingness to be one; to embrace your differences **SO THAT** – and here it is — **SO THAT** the world may believe that God has sent Me. That means that we and the gospel message hangs on our willingness to get over our petty differences and our egos and be a united front to the world to demonstrate that we believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. It's not really about us. It's part of what God is doing, because it points to His existence and it communicates so much about who He is. Our oneness is His fingerprint. It is Christ working in us. We would never make this happen all by ourselves. And that is the point.

The reason Jesus prayed that we would be one as They are one, is not so that we all just get along. He prayed for this because it is mission-critical. Our willingness to be one, and appear to be one to the world, is so that the world will see that we believe that God sent Jesus because He has a plan and that plan is currently in motion and He is at work in us. Mankind can count on that fact because they can see His work, His divine intervention, happening through our oneness. Our oneness demonstrates that there is a God and we are allowing Him to work through us. That there is a power beyond this physical world. A power that created us and should therefore guide us and direct us.

The implication is that if we don't get this right, it really doesn't matter what else we get right. If there is so much conflict, or differences, or people that are able to get between us and divide us, this gathering is not part of what God is doing. As we will

read in a moment, Jesus said that it is an identifier of His followers—His gathering. The whole *ekklesia* rests on our willingness to embrace this idea of a peculiar oneness.

And then we come to another *hina clause* in verse 23 of John 17:

23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

In other words, if you will answer this prayer and they embrace it, then the world will know that You are behind it and that there is something going on in this gathering of God's people that is other worldly. That is beyond this world. That is supernatural. That is beyond our talent and abilities. That is beyond our resources. It will become obvious that there is something divine about this assembly of people.

This makes it mission-critical for God's people. Disunity disrupts what God is doing. It makes us irrelevant. Unity among His people is a big deal to God.

Jesus had to pray about this because this is difficult. You don't pray about things that are going to happen anyway. You pray about things that you are not sure are going to happen without some divine intervention.

We don't drift into oneness. Furthermore, once it is achieved it requires constant work or we slip out of oneness. The second law of thermodynamics teaches us that everything requires additional effort just to maintain itself. Oneness is no different. If we aren't working every day to establish it, we are moving away from it.

To make sure this first century Church and those that would be called later would get this right, Jesus gave them a brand-new command near the end of His life. We've also read this many times, but it is so important and foundational to what we're talking about here. I think the timing of what we read in John 13:34 is significant. This is after the Passover service—near the end of His life—and He says to His disciples, "There's one more thing. This is critical." You don't waste words at a time like this. You talk about what is most important. Right?

John 13:34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Love one another. OK, they've heard that before. Everyone does that, but then He raised the bar and He said, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This is the thing that should characterize all of our relationships; every relationship that makes up our gathering.

Jesus did a lot for them, but before they knew it, in just a few hours, He would be arrested. He would be tried. He would be beaten. He be crucified and He would die. And very soon with the help of God's Holy Spirit, it would finally dawn on them what He meant that night. Soon it would dawn on them the significance and depth of what He

said. He loved them so much he died for them. When He said “Love one another as I have loved you,” it’s beyond being nice. It’s beyond being sensitive. It’s beyond being a good listener. It’s beyond being patient. It’s to the point of being willing to lay down our lives for each other. That’s what He commanded all of us to do.

So, when you look around the room, the question you and I should be asking is, how can I die for that person? That person who is so unlike me. How can I bury my ego for them? How can I eradicate my self-centeredness just for them? How can I submit my feelings to their needs? How can I give up my ego for that person? That person who in any other context, I would not be friends with.

So again, He said, “Why do I want you to do this? Just so you can all get along? So everything is nice?” No. Again, it’s not about you or me at all. In John 13:35 He said:

John 13:35 By this (kind of love that I just commanded you to have for each other, the world will know) **everyone will know that you are my disciples...** (my people, my called-out ones.)

If you all do “church” the same way; if you all use the same version of the Bible; if your Sabbath service takes exactly 2 hours; if you have acquired the knowledge necessary to judge each other. No, that’s not the guiding principle.

Jesus said, the world will know that you are my disciples if “you love one another.” It is an identifier of God’s people—His gathering. Our love either points to God working in us or it points to the fact that God is not present.

What makes oneness difficult is that it is a “self” issue, which is to say it is the whole ball of wax. It is an ego issue. It’s about “What is not right inside of me? Not everyone else, but me.”

What are the issues we need to think about so that people will conclude that this is an *ekklesia* whose identity is best described by oneness—the presence of God? The reality is embodied in how we as a group think and behave together. These habits show up in how we think, how we act and how we manage our personal emotions that signal and sustain our behaviors.

A key factor impacting our oneness is what it means to have our first love or lack thereof. It’s called “first” love because it is the frame of mind we have when we are first called. It kind of sounds like something we are to get over or get past as we grow and develop. It is indeed our first love, but it should really be our love or our frame of mind at all times.

Our first love is characterized by a zeal and a passion for God’s Word but, more importantly, it is characterized by humility. What makes it so powerful is our humility. It’s fueled by, “I don’t know.” We know that we don’t know and we desire to hear more of what God is beginning to show us. We accept feedback and instruction. We repent

and we eagerly seek to change direction. We can't get enough because we know we don't know.

But at some point, we begin to feel like we are getting things under control. We feel like we are more aligned with God's Word. We have a lot of new knowledge. We can see underlying issues behind the world's problems. We see the problems and disconnects in the people around us. Fueled now by answers, we stop asking questions. Our questions are replaced by opinions, solutions and criticisms. And quite frankly, we have dealt with the sins that are public and we are left with those inner thoughts and private actions that we really don't want to face.

In addition, where once we doubted the self, we now trust it more. The focus we had initially on God begins to be replaced by the self. Whereas our first love was made possible by our suppression of the self, we now allow it to take over. Instead of learners, we become authorities. It's easy at this point to allow our own thinking to mesh with God's Word, creating a hybrid that leads us off in all kinds of divisive directions. We kill the oneness that must be based on a laser-sharp focus on God.

First love describes a frame of mind that is focused on Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God and the implications of that. When we are busy criticizing, we aren't learning. We can think we are focused on God and enforcing His will, when really we are focused on the self; what I think, what I feel. And that is the source of divisions and offenses in the body of Christ and in any relationship we have.

When we leave our first love, stuff just insidiously creeps in because we aren't busy seeking. We aren't growing because we are preoccupied with explaining ourselves instead of trying to deal with our deep-seated personal issues. So where rationalizations begin, first love dies. It's always easier to explain a behavior than it is to change it. And we most easily grab excuses from the world around us to explain why we are the way we are. "I'm this way because that's just the way I'm made. The survey says that's just the way people are." That may be, but God has called us to something more now to further His plan to save all of mankind in the future.

You will recall in 1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 26, that Paul said that God called the weak of the world.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,

29 so that no one may boast before him.

Paul mentions this not as an excuse, but as a strategy. Our lives are a message. They should be pointing to the transforming power of God. It says something about what God can do through us if we are actively seeking Him. It's a call to always be upping our game—continual improvement.

We are not to sit around. We can't rest on our baggage. Reasonable explanations for our behavior and thinking are not acceptable, because God has called us to show the world that through His Holy Spirit we can be converted into people who are like Him.

Over time it's easy to be content to just sit and wait for Christ's return. That's not what God called us for, as Paul just explained. We have waiting for us, if we qualify, jobs of amazing responsibility. We are to be growing into them now. If we can't learn to control ourselves and develop what we are, how are we ever going to help others do the same? We are to be continually upping our game. How can I improve today?

The problem isn't that if I had just one more Bible study, then I would have the knowledge I need to change. Sometimes I wonder if we have too much information to process. What we need to do each week is to ask ourselves, "What one thing is going to be different in my life this week as a result of what I just heard?"

God will show us, if we allow Him to, where we need to put some attention. But we resist. It's scary. It's new territory. So, we react by blaming, shutting down, becoming passive-aggressive or lashing out. As Mr. Stiver recently remarked, "None of us can give unity a chance to develop roots if we play the victim or by pointing the finger at someone else. We can't even give unity a *chance* if that's where we're at."

It is hard to face ourselves and see where we are falling short. But if we don't, we will never grow into the people God requires us to be. Taking comfort in our lives now means diminished value to God in the future. We can't just sit here waiting for Christ to return. If we are not everything God meant us to be, then we have work to do. Few of us were born with a silver spoon, but that's the point from God's perspective. It's not about us. It's about showing the world what God can do through us. How He can take what we have been given in life and transform what we are into a godly person.

Another factor impacting our oneness is the toxic need to be right. Not only does it create discord, but we can't grow if we feel the need to be right; if we feel the need to have all the answers. Vulnerability leaves room for growth.

Here is something I read the other day:

"For our ego, the sensation of being right is like electricity to a lightbulb. It fuels us with energy and vigor. We sit straighter, our voice sharpens, and our language hardens. We face an issue or a conflict, and we see the answer clearly. With this certainty comes a feeling of power and righteousness, as captivating as a drug rush."

This is the way it is. Being right sweeps us so automatically into an aggressive mental stance that any collateral damage seems just a necessary evil.”

I can't speak for you but when I read that, I'm embarrassed. I can relate to that. And that puts us at odds with God. It's OK to have a point of view, but to think that your point of view is the one that should prevail is something altogether different. It takes you into a satanic state of mind.

Young people, if you want to be successful in your careers in this uncertain, changing environment, humility is the key. Being teachable. “I don't know. Let's find out.” One university professor calls it the new smart. What God is trying to teach us all, about humility, is not just a “Church thing.” It's something that will serve you well in every area of your life. We often get it in our mind that Church and life are two separate things. They are not. God is trying to lead each one of us to the place where we can flourish and help those around us to do the same.

Although we are just learning to get it right and we resist it, the *ekklesia* is the place where we help each other to do this most effectively. If you try to go off on your own, you will miss the challenge that God intended the *ekklesia* to provide us with and you may never fully develop the character you need to develop before Christ returns. The *ekklesia* is without question, hard. But if you're not trying to be right, you will learn the most profound things about yourself and be able to then address them in preparation for Christ's return.

The self—our egos—would have us believe that it is acting in our best interest, but it is really cheating us out of what God has for us. Our ego wants us to think we know better, we deserve better, we don't need to be forgiven, we don't need to sacrifice because we are better than that. We matter more than anything else. James warned us when he said, “For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil.” Humility brings us together.

We need to approach each other as learners. And that goes double for those of us that have been at this for decades, because we can become the most calcified. Feedback is a learning moment. Take advantage of it.

None of us are born with God's mind. In fact, the Bible tells us that we are born with a mind that thinks and reasons in opposition to God's mind. Our mind won't become God-like without feedback. It won't change without some painful self-understanding. It won't come without some embarrassing moments. The Holy Spirit will lead us into these things, so we must embrace them as they come along, no matter how painful they feel.

Oneness is about being other-centered. It's my pride—it's my selfish desires—that have to be surrendered daily for there to be unity in the body of Christ.

When we consciously or unconsciously focus on the negative in others, we actually influence others to be less than they could be, limiting their potential. We become counterproductive to everything God is trying to do in each of us. Our own growth is damaged. We become the problem.

When we feel like victims we actually become the victimizers in the body. It's not by chance that Paul told the Philippians in chapter 4, verse 8 to think on these things:

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When we do, it builds us and those around us up. The issue isn't whether or not other people have problems and blind spots. Of course they do. The issue is what we are focusing on. Are we an asset or a liability to our relationships and, by extension, to the whole body of Christ?

When we see those in the *ekklesia* and something they are doing doesn't seem right, instead of plunging into judgment and correction, assured of our rightness, we need to instead think: "Here is a person called by God. He is working with them and bringing them to an understanding of His mind in His good timing. What am I missing here? What do I need to understand?" Then we need get to know them. Set an example. We need to do this before we ever suggest a correction. I am not suggesting we drop godly standards. I am suggesting that we take into account the reality of what God is doing with each and every one of us. Something we can easily overlook.

Our job isn't to protect the Word of God. Our job is to live it.

So "love one another as I have loved you" is the new ethic that Jesus commanded of us. This is so important that Paul emphasized it everywhere he went. Over and over, he spells it out in case we didn't really get what Jesus was commanding us to do. So he says to the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Galatians and the Corinthians and to everyone else:

Forgive one another
Encourage one another
Restore one another
Accept one another
Care for one another
Submit to one another
Carry one another's burdens
Bear with one another

He emphasized this because, as he told the Ephesians in chapter 4, verse 4 of their letter, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.”

He emphasized this because, as he told the Galatians in chapter 6, verse 2 of their letter, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” The new law Christ gave us. Love each other as I have loved you.

Paul links this right back to what Jesus commanded us to do at the end of His physical life.

Paul wanted to make sure that there was no wiggle room. No excuses. “Oh, is that what He means? I didn’t know.” Paul said, “Jesus said love one another as I have loved you.” Let me be specific about that:

Forgive one another.
Encourage one another.
Restore one another.
Accept one another.
Care for one another.
Submit to one another.
Carry one another’s burdens.
Bear with one another.

That is unusual, isn’t it? It means the self has to die. Young people, this means you, too. We all must up our game. Dump the drama. We have to build each other up. There’s no competition here. There’s no, “I’m better than you.” We have to understand that when we lift someone else up, we are lifted up. It’s not a zero-sum game.

There are times when we all need to forgive readily and willingly as we want to be forgiven or we won’t be forgiven. We all need to be encouraged from time to time. We need to be accepted and cared for so convincingly, so that when we do have to say the hard things *for* each other, we know it’s because we are loved and accepted. And sometimes we need to be restored along the way. And there are times in our life when we need someone to carry our burden with us and be patient with us. I think everyone wants these things. I think everyone needs these things. Living in, but not of, this world requires this of us.

What if we just did these things with one another? Imagine a world where people were skeptical of what we believed, but were envious of the way we treated each other. “How do they do that?”

It is unusual, but Paul said this should characterize our relationships. This needs to characterize the relationships in the Church of God. But it’s not just unusual for a group

of people to do this, it is uncomfortable. You have to fight for it. It doesn't just happen. We have barriers in our thinking that we have to get over. As did the apostle Peter.

About 15 years after Christ was resurrected, those closest to Jesus—His disciples—still had a hard time thinking about the Gentiles as being a part of the *ekklesia*.

In fact, Peter had a very hard time with this. Fifteen years later, he still hadn't stepped inside a Gentile's home. So, God gave Him a vision that we've read about in Acts chapter 10. You know the story. The sheet came down with all kinds of animals in it. He was told to eat. And he said, "No way." And a voice said, "What God has cleansed you must not call unclean." So Peter wakes up still wondering what this all means. It wasn't a call to eat unclean food. There was something else going on. After all Peter had seen, did he really think he wasn't going to have to interact with Gentiles? But it is very uncomfortable to associate with people you typically don't associate with. And the Jewish law forbade it.

The next thing you know he's invited into the home of a centurion. It's no coincidence that he's invited into Cornelius' home. And he walks in the door and sees many other Gentiles present.

Acts 10:27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

And here's what he says to them.

28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile..."

How's that for an opener? "I just want you to know, as I'm sure you are well aware, that I'm not supposed to be here with you."

This is so uncomfortable for Peter. You would think he would know this. But even 15 years later he says things that you have to wonder if he asked Luke, "Hey, would you mind not including that?" But Luke leaves it in for us to learn from. Of course, Peter knew that because not only was Peter all about learning and becoming more like God, he was looking to help those that would come after him.

Unity is hard. And Peter continues in verse 28:

28 ...But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

In other words, "Folks, here in Cornelius' home, up until this moment I have considered all of you here impure and unclean. By the way, thanks for having me." Did he say that with his outside voice? But that's what a big deal this was.

Then in verses 34-35:

34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism"

35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

No partiality. This is fifteen years later. That's the introduction to his sermon. And you know what happened. He didn't even get to finish his sermon because the Holy Spirit fell upon all those listening. And here's the thing: It says those that came with Peter were astonished by this. Astonished that the Gentiles—those people unlike them—were to be included in what God was doing also. This exemplifies how difficult this is. Oneness is hard.

And five years later they are still struggling with this concept. So, they have the conference as reported in chapter 15. "Are we really going to let these Gentiles in without becoming circumcised first?" Oneness has always been difficult. It's not something we can do on our own. We need God's intervention. Otherwise, if it happens at all, it's just superficial. It's not deep enough to point to the presence of the Living God.

When Jesus told His disciples that the gospel would be preached to all of the world, one of the ideas He was trying to convey is that this message, this knowledge that you have been given, is not just for you and your friends. This is meant for all mankind. Share it with everyone. Share it with the whole world.

We must look beyond the things we don't have in common to focus on the one thing we do have in common. There is a bigger picture to focus on than what we don't have in common.

While we wrestle with this on the inside, let's hope the world is fascinated by what they see from the outside.

And here's the thing. If we aren't growing closer to God, if we aren't behaving and thinking like God thinks, we are undermining the cohesiveness of the whole body of Christ. It's important to understand, too, that we can't think we can have oneness here and not in every other relationship in our life. If it is just something we do for a few hours on the Sabbath, then we are not connected to the Father; we are not at one with Him. It becomes something we are doing by our own force of will and that is not lasting and it doesn't fulfill the purpose God intended. It's not revealing Him to the world.

Oneness can't just be something we talk about, it must be what people see us doing. Oneness isn't a destination, it is a chosen behavior. If we aren't revealing the existence of God, we are just another group coming together to make ourselves feel good.

We need each other because *it is who we are together* that shows the mind of God. If people aren't walking away thinking that God must be present here, we are the problem.

Most of us put too much energy into where we are and not enough energy into where we are going. What we believe and where we are going is what binds us together. And when all of us, all of us different kinds of people, come together with one heart and one mind, it's a powerful thing. And when a watching world sees that miracle, they just might think, "You know, there must be a God. What is going on there?"

This must be fought for because it is unnatural. It is not of this world. Will we fight for it? As far as it depends upon you, is it a priority?

In Proverbs chapter 6 we read that there are six things the Lord hates, but especially the seventh:

Proverbs 6:17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,

18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,

19 a false witness who pours out lies and (what?) a person who stirs up conflict in the community (in their relationships).

God hates disunity in the Body. But it is not something we can bring about on our own. And that's the point. It's not about us. It is our yielding to Him that brings it about. If it feels difficult, we're doing it right.

By our love for each other—our oneness—the world will know that you are My disciples, Jesus said. If you get this right, then the world will know that He was sent by God and God is on His throne and He has a plan and it is in motion. And they will know that this group of people is in fact the body of Christ—His *ekklesia*—because they will see His mind at work in His gathering. ♦