

One Light, One World – unity and the scriptures

Notes to accompany the texts [in the booklet](#).

Deuteronomy 6.4-7

These well-known words with which every Jewish act of worship begins were, to the earliest Hebrews, a declaration of loyalty. They lived in a world of many gods where they were constantly tempted to seek the help of the gods of their apparently more powerful neighbours. So they were commanded to love God and treasure his word in their hearts. The heart was a figure of the seat of a person's deepest will, emotions, vision and commitment. It controls the direction in which a person's whole life is moving and pushes them further on. There need be no confusion between the physical organ and the spiritual capacity. As a small boy once said, "We have two hearts – one to pump blood with and another to love with – but God has only one heart; to love with."



Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. Psalm 86.11

Mark 12.28-31

That Jesus cited the Shema as the greatest commandment would have surprised no-one. Even his most strident opponents could not disagree. What was surprising was that he immediately went on to take another commandment from comparative obscurity and set it alongside the first. In the teaching of Jesus, loving God and loving your neighbour are equally binding obligations. Even this would not have caused too much of a stir had not Jesus gone on to redefine the concept of a neighbour. The subversive story of the Good Samaritan shows that the neighbour you are commanded to love is not the person nearest and most similar to you but the one to whom you have the opportunity to show compassion. Trying to meet the needs of every needy person beside every roadside soon leads to compassion fatigue. Showing the love God gives to those whom he gives us to love is sustainable. We just need to always remember that 'neighbours are nearby and far away'.

Psalm 89.5-8

We can only put our ideas of who God is into words by comparing God with something. For the Psalmist, the most splendid gathering he could imagine was the court of a great Emperor with incomparable wealth and power. Just to be in the presence of such a man was considered an awesome privilege. How much more so to be in the presence of God! Those heavenly beings are utterly holy but none of them can compare with the exalted otherness of God. The key character of God celebrated here is faithfulness, elsewhere translated as 'covenant love'. Whenever we enter or renew a covenant, either with God or with other people, we are engaging with the astounding reality of God's faithfulness.

Genesis 1.26-31

There are times when the appalling evidence of human wickedness can make us wonder whether the creation of the human race was really such a good idea. Sometimes the mutual incomprehension between men and women prompts some to question if we really are of the same species or even from the same planet! But the simple majesty of the Genesis creation narrative affirms our common origin to be blessed and be a blessing. Being made in the image of God means not only reflecting the nature of God, in that we too are spiritual realities with eternal souls, but also that we are made to show the sovereignty of God over the whole earth. The ecumenical vision of the whole earth as God's concern is therefore grounded in our creation in the image of God.

Isaiah 40.21–26

The trouble with the gods of the Gentiles was that they were too small. Each tribal god was invoked to defend the interests of its own tribe against the incursions of other tribes. Modern tribal warfare has fared no better with sophisticated armies going into battle with the ringing assurance that God was 'on their side'. It is when we 'lift up our eyes' beyond our immediate concerns to see the bigger picture that we realise that God is greater than we imagined. The Hebrew history recorded in the Bible shows a progression from henotheism ('There are lots of gods but this is our one') to monotheism ('There is only one God'). Monotheism implies that our God is everyone's God even though we may think and speak of God in radically different ways. The bigger picture means not denying our significant differences but holding them in conversation rather than in conflict because God is greater than all our thoughts and words.

Psalm 24.1–2

We do not need to embrace the Psalmist's cosmology of the earth as some kind of flat raft floating on the sea to share his faith affirmation that it all belongs to God. But this does challenge the concept, so fundamental to our developed economy, of the ownership of land. There are still places in the world where all the land belongs to everyone. Those who want a piece of land to cultivate are allocated what they need for as long as they need and can use it. Land is no more a commodity for sale than air or sky. But how can we live this out in our modern city centres where a square metre of land is worth a fortune? Only by refusing to possess our possessions. If 'the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it' then even a piece of it which has my name on the title deeds is not really mine. It is only lent to me for as long as I need and can use it. All those people who have no part of the earth with their name on it are also part of the 'everyone' who show God's sovereignty over the earth. I cannot justly occupy my part of it while I disregard them.

Matthew 24.14

Some folk say that they can't find the word 'ecumenical' in their Bibles but there is no doubt that the word 'oikoumene' from which it derives is there. Here it is translated as 'the world'. The first readers of Matthew's Gospel had little idea of the world beyond the rim of the Mediterranean but for us it has become a global village where news and commerce crosses whole continents in fractions of a second. The heralding of the Gospel throughout this bigger-yet-smaller world is given a destination, the end time. Rather than a date on a calendar, this is the goal of a process which will not be reached until every nation has heard the Good News. In this sense the ecumenical vision is profoundly evangelical since the good news is for all the nations of the earth.

Romans 8, 19-23

To the modern mind, this is a particularly puzzling passage, yet when unpacked, full of significance for our understanding of the purpose and destiny of the one Church of God. The concept of the creation being subjected to futility by God's will would not have been so difficult for the Jews and first Christians of Paul's time as they believed that nothing happened without God's will in some way, however inscrutably, being involved. A further problem is involved for us. We take for granted that we are the adopted children of God, so what does Paul mean when he says that we groan as we await our adoption? The answer is to be found in the very complex concept of salvation that underlies his theology and much of that of the apostolic Church. It sees salvation as a process that begins with divine call and human response, with human embracing of the promises of God and with reception into the Church by baptism. It continues with growth in discipleship and corporate growth in the maturing life of the Church as it grows into Christ (see above) but it is not complete until God has finished the work of redemption which is not a purely 'spiritual' matter but also involves the work of glorification (cf Rom 8:28) which is of body as well as soul.

The creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God'. This only happens when the work of redemption within the Church and amongst all its members reaches its fulfilment in Christ, when as Vatican II puts it 'all the promises of God are fulfilled in her'. Then the children of God will be revealed in the fullness of eschatological glory and all the nations of the world will resort to the new Jerusalem, the new Israel of God, being finally able to see in it, and thus identify with it, the final fulfilment of every previous hope for an harmonious world and a perfected creation. At that point, the Church, the family of the children of God will have fulfilled completely its role as sign, instrument and first fruits of the Kingdom and that Kingdom will be brought in by Christ.

We note the related teaching of St John: 'We do not know yet what we shall be like, but we know that when He appears we shall be like him'. That is the final hope of the Church.

John 3.16

The best-known verse in the Bible has been called 'the gospel in a nutshell.' It summarises in a few words how God's purpose in the life and work of Jesus Christ relates to the world and the consequences of trusting in him. There is a paradox in that here the world is the object of the eternal redeeming love of God while in 1 John 2.15 we are told 'do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world'. It is the costly love of God which transforms the world from a stultifying system of impersonal control into the meeting place of grace and faith. A Godless world leads to utter futility, complete ruination. Trust in Jesus Christ leads instead to the life of the coming age, life as God always intended it to be, life in all its fullness.

Romans 11.33–36

Some people say that in the modern world, altruism – kindness shown to others with no expectation that they might show kindness back in turn – has given way to mutuality: I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine. But mutuality will never work in our relation with God because there is nothing we can ever do which might oblige God to repay us.

Genesis 12.1–3

Blessing is a benediction, speaking well of someone. When God speaks it is never empty words but always powerful creative Word. So it is God's blessing which turns an obscure nomad into the Patriarch shared by three great world religions.

1 Peter 2.9–10

This text picks up ideas from Hosea 1.9f, also quoted by Paul in Romans 9.25f. The question is who are the people of God? Their particular character is holiness, no longer the Levitical idea of holiness as separation from anyone considered impure but Jesus' radical holiness which reaches out to all with loving compassion.

1 Corinthians 1.2–3

The Corinthian Church clearly had its faults yet Paul addresses them collectively as those who are all called to be God's holy people. The 17th Century English Puritans are much maligned in popular thinking today yet in spirituality they, as C S Lewis commented, 'abolished the honours degree and raised the pass mark!'

Psalms 95.1–7

The analogy of a shepherd and his flock of sheep is often used in the Bible and Christian hymnody to point to God and God's people. Even those who live far from sheep-rearing can identify with it. It gives us the concept of pastoral care, shown supremely by the Good Shepherd for all his sheep.

John 11.49–52

Caiaphas didn't realise the deeper significance of his words. As High Priest, he was considered to have a prophetic as well as priestly rôle. His expediency meant sacrificing a troublesome peasant preacher rather than risking the wrath of the Romans at the threat of rebellion. The Gospel writer points from this to the profound truth that it is the death of Jesus on the Cross which unites all God's people everywhere.

John 10.14-16

Jesus stresses the mutual intimacy of knowledge that unites him, the true shepherd, with the sheep of his flock. The height and depth of that mutual knowledge is indicated in the comparison with the mutual knowledge uniting the Father and the Son and expressed in the Son's preparedness to lay down his life for the sheep. Jesus refers to the other sheep that are not of this fold. This has usually been understood as a reference to the gentile Christians that were soon, though not without controversy, to be admitted to the Church. These gentile Christians will also listen to the voice of Jesus, the implication being that they will be called into that same intimacy of relationship with him that is already enjoyed by his current Jewish disciples. Being integrated into the same deep intimacy with Jesus, there will necessarily result one and the same flock under the one shepherd.

Galatians 4.6–7

Some of the Galatian Christians had grown up being told they were nobodies. But in Christ they had become those who could address Almighty God with the familiar word 'Abba'. Whenever we do so, we recognise our kinship with each one who comes to the same Throne of Grace.

1 Corinthians 15.24–28

This chapter sets the resurrection of Christ in the vision of the whole purpose of God. We find our direction by focussing on the goal, whatever the setbacks and diversions on the way. When God is all in all and everything is subject to God, the Church will be one and our divisions will be healed.

John 12.32

A crowd gathered to watch Jesus being hoisted up on the Cross, some to weep and some to jeer. What a cruel coronation and enthronement for the King of the Jews! Yet of all that he said and did, it is this which most draws people of all kinds to follow him.

Ephesians 1.7-12

Central to any consideration of the imperative of unity for the Church is a consideration of the overall plan of God for his universe. Paul emphasises that in Christ the fullness of God's plan to 'gather up' (some translations read 'reconcile') up all things in him is made known. Christ is God's agent in this universal reconciliation and harmonisation of all things and it is through His Body the Church that Christ acts in beginning this process of reconciliation.

John 17.20–23

Jesus' prayer is the most frequently quoted passage about the need for Christian unity. Jesus begins with his first disciples but extends his petition to those who were not yet believers or not even born, including ourselves. Our unity is evidence that Jesus really was sent by God and that together we are loved by God.

Romans 5.10–11

If the divided state of the Church is a symptom of its disease, then the life of Christ is the only remedy. The verb Paul uses here means both to save and to heal. It is only the life of the risen Christ flowing through the Church which can bring healing and wholeness.

Colossians 1.15–20

It is amazing that these words were written less than thirty years after Jesus walked and talked in Galilee. They affirm that the reconciliation he brought about through his death is effective not only for his nation and contemporaries, or even for the whole human race of all times, but for the entire universe.

Ephesians 2.13-22

This deals with the same incorporation of Jews and gentiles into the one Church as the previous passage. It is Christ, who has died for all, who has broken down the previously prevailing hostility between Jews and Gentiles and who now gives access to the Father through the one Spirit (which since the time of Cornelius has also been received by many gentiles). The result is that the gentile Christians are no longer 'strangers and aliens' as accounted previously not only by Jews but even, at first, by Jewish Christians, but are now on an equal footing. Paul stresses that the Church has Jesus as the one cornerstone but that it is subsidiarily built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, both those originally sent by Jesus and those whom the Spirit has then and subsequently endowed with special gifts of insight and discernment. Through the harmonious co-operation engendered by Christ and the common allegiance to Him, the whole Church grows in faith and love.

Romans 15.10–11

I will praise you, Lord God, among the nations!
I will sing hymns of triumph to your name!
Join in rich celebration with his people;
All the nations praise the Lord's mighty fame.
(11.10.11.10)

Acts 2.1–6

This one time the whole Church was together in one place. One consequence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first Christians was that they began to spread out from there. It was already a place hallowed by the Last Supper of Jesus with the Apostles and a place for the loosening of burdens (kataluma – Luke 22.11) but the Spirit thrust them on.

1 Corinthians 14.31–33

Charismatic worship can appear chaotic to those who expect an ordered liturgy. Even Spirit-filled worshippers are still sinners so there is always the possibility of self-indulgence and assertiveness. But the Spirit who inspires also brings order and harmony, enabling each to exercise their gifts only for the benefit of all.

Ephesians 4.7, 11-16

This passage develops further the thought of the immediately preceding one. Here the common reason for the development of the many separate gifts and ministries within the one Church is made clear. It is that through their joint and harmonious operation, all the people of God might be equipped for mutual support and ministry and for the building up of the body to the full extent envisaged and required by the plan of God for full redemption. Great emphasis is placed upon the idea that all the members of the body should grow to maturity which is defined as being nothing less than the full maturity of Christ, that is, into such a quality of

discipleship that it mirrors and reflects the very quality of the humanity of Jesus. Christians must become fully grounded in mature understanding of their faith so that they are not easily misled by those with eccentric views that distort the fullness of the Gospel and its balanced message relating to every aspect of human life and calling. Christians are to avoid this by growing up in the way of the Christ whose words and deeds, as a hymn puts it, were one. The term 'speaking the truth in love' does not just refer to mutual correction and exhortation, significant and important as they may be, but can be even better translated from the Greek original as doing the truth in love, that is to say incarnating, as it were, in their own way of life the truth of him who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. It is in this way that each individual Christian plays his or her part in the building up, through harmonious interchange, of the entire body in love. It is in the unity of the one proclamation and the one embodiment in fellowship of the truth of Christ that the one Church is maintained and develops towards its God given destiny and maturity.

Romans 12.3–5

It's no use a toe insisting on trying to be an eye! Our bodies only work when each part fulfils its proper function. This should not mean a ranking order of 'major' and 'minor' members of the Body of Christ since each is essential to the Body's health and growth.

1 Peter 4.8–11

Constant love is maintained and multitudes of sins are forgiven when various gifts are used in the service of others. This requires, though, willingness to serve others, to accept the gifts you have been given without envying those given to others, and being ready to receive the loving service of others.

Ephesians 3.14–16

It is the power of the Holy Spirit which enables us to see our 'family likeness' with all the children of God. Human weakness sees others as rivals to be resisted or weaker ones to be exploited but Christian love sees them as sisters and brothers to be cherished.

John 13.3–15

The Gospels record two actions of Jesus at the Last Supper which he did himself and also told his disciples to do. Most Christians actually eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of his death but the other act of washing feet is usually taken figuratively as a call to humble service. Would we be less divided if we literally washed each other's feet?

Luke 22.24–30

The military command model of management has the attractions of clarity and stability; everyone knows their place. But Jesus deliberately turns the pyramid upside down making an extremely unstable structure which can only be held up by constant faith. The temptation is to go for the easier, more stable option.

1 Peter 1.22

The heart in biblical language is the seat of the will, emotions and deepest desires. Whatever fills the heart drives the person. So if our hearts are filled with God's covenant love towards us that will impel us forward in loving others – even if we don't like them!

1 John 4.7–11

Loving one another is not an onerous duty which we hardly ever fulfil. It would be so if it relied on our own resources of compassion and sympathy. But when God fills our hearts with his love, we have an endless supply. We leak... but God fills us again!

1 John 4.19–21

God did not love us because we were so lovable; we were, in fact, most unlovely. It is knowing that we are loved despite our unloveliness which gives us the resource with which to love others, even if they appear to be unlovely too.

1 Corinthians 12.31—13.1–13

If the greatest virtue was faith or hope we might argue over who had most or the right kind. But since it is love, there is no room for argument, only for practical action. The Samaritan who cared for the victim on the Jericho Road showed real love across the deep divisions.

Philippians 2.5–11

In this early hymn, the example of Christ shows that the way up is the way down. Unlike Lucifer who grasped for what was not his and fell from grace, Christ relinquished the exalted place which was his and took the lowest, most despised place in the universe. We do likewise when our minds are renewed by his.

Matthew 5.21–24

Remembering that your brother or sister has something against you (rather than that you have something against them!) and proceeding to worship God as if all was well is hypocrisy. Broken fellowship should not preclude worship; the requirement to worship makes unavoidable the quest for reconciliation.

1 Corinthians 1.10–13

The seeds of denominationalism were sprouting into weeds in the Corinthian Church. Some Christians were making more of the preacher through whom they came to faith than of the faith they had come to! Others were above all that, claiming to follow only Christ. But all need the humility of a common mind and purpose.

Romans 13.8

The scribes had developed the Law of Moses into a plethora of regulations which were a heavy burden, especially for poor people. Jesus' summary of the whole Law in the two commandments to love God and love your neighbour is liberating. Loving others fulfils your indebtedness.

Romans 14.13–18

Some Christians make consider others over-scrupulous; others may find them too lax. What is most important is that each regards the other as 'one for whom Christ died'. In a world where many people are treated as worthless or expendable, this is the only standard of the true value of each woman and man.

Hebrews 12.14–15

It may seem impossible to seek both peace and holiness if holiness is regarded as separation from all unholiness. But the holiness of Jesus, the friend of sinners, is perfect love. Becoming so filled with the love of God that there is no room for anything less leads to shalom, the peace of God beyond understanding.

Romans 15.7

Jesus welcomed the people whom society rejected – poor, diseased, disturbed, disgraced, 'mere' women and children – yet for his own appearance there was no welcome. Christians

demonstrate the transformation which the gospel brings about when they welcome others as if they were welcoming Christ himself.

Psalm 85.10–11

Love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will embrace.
Human loyalty will reach up from the earth,
And God's righteousness will look down from heaven.

Luke 5.1–8

Galilean fishermen lived by a subsistence economy, normally catching only enough fish in a night to feed their families for a day. So a night without a fry meant a lean day and a bumper catch meant a feast. Selfishness would have meant broken nets and a lost treasure; cooperation led to an increased blessing.

Galatians 6.1–2

Apart from the law of Christ, the law of love, we tend to leave everyone to bear their own burdens, even adding to them if it is to our advantage. But love 'bears all things', including the weakness and short-sightedness of others, just as others do for us.

Romans 15.1–2

Within the Church the strong must put up with the weak. They may well find they have hidden weaknesses and the weak have hidden strengths. Without self-discipline, the weak are exploited by the strong but with the discipline of following Christ, both weak and strong are built up by caring for each other.

1 Corinthians 12.12–31

Dissension within the Body of Christ is evidence of a lack of reciprocal care. Even when we believe others are wrong, only love can put things right. If I have toothache, my whole body knows it; if I enjoy a good meal, not only my stomach benefits. It is so with the Body of Christ.

Psalm 1.1–3

Delight in the Law of the Lord does not lead to joyless legalism if that Law is the Law of Love. Instead, love is source of that ever-flowing stream which brings strength, health and fruitfulness to the tree of life.

John 15.1–16

Every branch of the vine is connected organically to every other branch as they all draw their essential sustenance from the same root which is Christ. This means that Christian unity is not something extra to be created but an intrinsic reality to be discerned.

Acts 2.42–47

This famous passage begins with the four essential marks of the Church, continuing in the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship that marked the Church of apostolic times, the celebration of the eucharist and the maintenance of a life of prayer. It stresses the joy and generosity of the first Christians and their remarkable experiment in complete sharing of goods. John Wesley makes an interesting comment on this. 'How came they so to act, seeing that we know of no positive command to do so. I answer that they so acted, led naturally by the Spirit they enjoyed. Observe, they were of one heart and mind'. All Christian life since can be evaluated in terms of its conformity to the four essential marks mentioned in

the first verse and to the extent that it manifests joy in generosity as the response to the Father's gift of Christ and the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 13.11–13

Even when full agreement with one another is not possible, it is the only proper goal. When we cannot agree on an important matter, we can agree that we want to agree and that the truth is greater than our present understanding of it. In that way, we are ready to learn from those we disagree with that which we would never learn from those with whom we agree.

1 John 1.3–7

Christian fellowship demands radical honesty. Even the most well-meaning untruth can spoil fellowship because it introduces darkness where there should only be light. The love of God gives us strength to take the risk of walking in the light with each other.

Galatians 3.26–29

The only uniformity in Christian unity is the uniform of baptism: all baptized Christians have put on Christ! Whatever the visible differences which formerly divided us, it is now the shared identity of being clothed in Christ which matters. Everything after that is commentary.

Ephesians 4.2–6

There is an urgency in this exhortation to make every effort; it is the priority. Unity must be maintained like the hawsers which prevent a mighty ship from crashing into the breakwater. The Spirit gives the bond of peace – God's shalom which is fullness of life in right relationships.

1 Thessalonians 5.13–25

Christians will always be open to the charge of being do-gooders... At least it is better than being do-bad-ers or do-nothing-ers! It may not always be possible to do good for one another but it is always possible and right to try. Giving thanks to God in all circumstances is a spiritual discipline which many have found creates new possibilities.

Psalms 133.1–3

The precious oil on Aaron's beard and collar is his priestly anointing which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit gives the anointing of unity which enables us to stand before the holiness of God for and with each other. The blessing is that life which flows from the eternal reality of God.

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