

The Gospel and Our Community

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[0 : 00] Today's scripture comes from the books of John and Galatians. Please follow along in your bulletin. Jesus said, I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their message.

May they all be one as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us so the world may believe you sent me.

I have given them the glory you have given me. May they be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me.

May they be made completely one so the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me. Father, I desire those you have given me to be with me where I am.

Then they will see my glory, which you have given me, because you loved me before the world's foundation. Righteous Father, the world has not known you.

[1 : 07] However, I have known you and these have known that you sent me. I made your name known to them and will make it known.

So the love you have loved me with may be in them and I may be in them. And in Galatians it says, I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit. And the Spirit desires what is against the flesh.

These are opposed to each other so that you don't do what you want.

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious.

Sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry.

Sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy. Outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissension, factions.

[2 : 20] Envy, drunkenness, carousing and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance, as I told you before. That those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness.

Goodness. Faith. Gentleness. Self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit.

We must not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you also won't be tempted.

[3 : 29] Carry one another's burdens. In this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

But each person should examine his own work, and then he will have a reason for boasting in himself alone, and not in respect for someone else.

For each person will have to carry his own load. The one who is taught the message must share all his good things with the teacher. Don't be deceived.

God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, he will also reap. Because the one who sows to his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh.

But the one who sows in the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So we must not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up.

[4 : 36] Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all. Especially for those who belong to the household of faith. This is the reading of God's Word.

God bless you.

And we've learned that you guys have a unique kind of sense of humor. And a unique kind of taste in food and language and all these different things.

But speaking of food and language, I'm going to tell you a joke about three different nationalities. It goes like this. There was an Englishman, an Irishman, and an Australian.

And they were working on a building. And they used to sit up at the top of the building and eat their lunch every day. And so they'd crack up, open their lunch. And the Englishman opened his sandwich, his box.

[5 : 56] And he had a ham sandwich. He was like, oh, ham sandwiches again. If I have another ham sandwich, I'm going to jump off this cliff. I mean, this building that we're working on. And then the Irishman, he kind of opened his lunchbox.

And he had tomato sandwiches. And he said, oh, tomato sandwiches again? If I have another tomato sandwich, I'm going to jump off this building tomorrow. And then the Australian said, he opened his sandwich.

And it was like, oh, a Vegemite sandwich. This is another Vegemite sandwich. If I have another Vegemite sandwich tomorrow, I'm going to jump off this building. And then they all go home and have a peaceful night, come back the next morning.

And there they are again, sitting on the scaffolding of the building. And they open up their lunchboxes. And what do they get? Ham, tomato, and Vegemite. And so the three, as they said, jumped off the building to their death.

And at their... There's more. There's more. It's the end of the joke. It's Australian humor. No, no, there's more. There's more.

[7 : 06] At the funeral, the three wives of the three men who knew each other got together. And they were kind of in tears. They said they couldn't understand what happened.

And the English wife said, I don't understand. He loved ham sandwiches. And the wife of the Irish man said, yeah, I don't understand.

He loved tomato sandwiches. And the wife of the Australian man said, I don't understand. He made his own sandwiches. He's... So we don't need different Americans or nationalities making fun of Australians, because we do a good enough job of that on our own.

And that story has nothing to do with the sermon, except... Except perhaps that these guys lived in community.

And in fact, they lived and died together. I want to talk a little bit about different communities that the world has.

[8 : 22] So there's... You know, the communities that you know as you're growing up, in the playground, at school, in primary school, in high school, and then in university. And then there's communities of kind of fellowships, of post-grads...

Oh, sorry. Graduate fellowships and working fellowships and things like that. And the world is organized into different communities. And of course, on a much bigger scale, there's the communities of your district, your neighborhood, your nation, your city.

Those of you who remember... Or maybe some of you haven't got there yet, but those of you who remember university days, you know that there's all these clubs and societies which people sign up for. And in my first year at university, I signed up for like seven or eight clubs from the debating society to the table tennis society to all these different groups, only to realize I didn't have enough time to get involved in all of them.

But, you know, there's some interesting societies out there. There's like the Homus Appreciation Society, one in England, and the Harry Potter Society. They're springing up all over campuses. And when my old church, this guy, he loved Pokemon cards.

And he had a collection of the toys and all kinds of things. So when he got to uni, he started the Pokemon Society, of which he is now the president. And one of like four members.

[9 : 44] And so maybe we shouldn't be surprised, or we shouldn't be surprised, if the atheists would get together and form a society as well.

And so there's been, in the news you might have read recently, an atheist community church, which started in the UK, called the Sunday Assembly.

It's a London-based atheist church. And it has, since its January launch, grown in capacity to having two services and, you know, several hundred, maybe four or five hundred people each.

And so they just announced a new global missionary tour. In October and November, affiliated Sunday Assemblies will open in 22 cities, in England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada, the United States, and Australia.

I think this is the moment, the founder said, when Sunday Assembly goes from being an interesting phenomenon to being a truly global movement. The 3,000% growth rate we have seen might make this non-religious assembly the fastest growing church in the world.

[10:49] And the journalist, who's an atheist himself, goes on to say that he likes the idea of a secular temple where atheists can enjoy the benefits of an idealized traditional church, a sense of community, a thought-provoking sermon, a scheduled period of respite, easy access to community service opportunities, group singing, an ethos of self-improvement, free food, without the singing imposition of a God.

See, our world is striving for community in an alienated, lonely, and disconnected world. Everybody's looking for it, and everybody seeks it in the common interest of the people that they find and bind themselves together with.

And yet, is this the community that the Christian church is supposed to be about? One of the, an American theologian called Stanley Harvass warns about this.

He says, when people are very detached, very devoid of purpose and a coherent worldview, Christians must be very suspicious of talk about community. In a world like ours, people will be attracted to communities that promise them an easy way out of loneliness, togetherness based on common tastes, racial or ethnic traits, or mutual self-interest.

There is then little check on community becoming as tyrannical as the individual ego. Community becomes totalitarian when its only purpose is to foster a sense of belonging in order to overcome the fragility of the lone individual.

[12:24] What he's saying is that people can come together and they can come to church, to the Christian church, to seek community, but they're coming simply to satisfy their own desires, their own longings, and that can poison the church.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a pastor, principal of an underground seminary, an agent of the German resistance, and eventually killed, executed by the Nazi regime in 1945 at the end of World War II, said this, The Christian community is not a spiritual sanatorium.

The person who comes into a fellowship because he is running away from himself is misusing it for the sake of diversion, no matter how spiritual this diversion may appear. He is really not seeking community at all, but the only distraction which will allow him to forget his loneliness for a brief time, the very alienation that creates the deadly isolation of man.

And in fact, he says, Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community.

Is the community of the church, of Christ, of God here, simply a place where people can come and kind of fill that gap of loneliness in their hearts?

[13:47] Simply a place where people can come and connect and be together and spend some time with each other before going their separate ways. Because that seems to be what community is all about in this world.

A place where people can come, have shared interests, spend some time together laughing and enjoying each other's company and then splitting off again to do their own thing, to be their own people.

Is that the kind of community, community, a Christian community should look like? St. Halva states that the community life is not so much about togetherness as about the way of Jesus Christ with those whom he calls to himself.

And so we read today from John chapter 17. And I don't know if you have ever prayed to God out of the longing of your heart and asked him for things for yourself or for your friends or for those who you know, your loved ones.

If you have, I wonder if you've ever, you've ever wondered what Jesus would have prayed for you. What would be on his heart as he thinks of you, as he thought of you?

[15:07] And what would he have prayed for you? What would he have prayed to God on behalf of you? I think John 17 is a very precious passage because there it tells us what Jesus prayed for us.

See, in the first part of the passage he prays for himself and God's glory to be known, to be revealed as he goes to the place where God's glory is going to be revealed which is the cross. And then after that he prays for the disciples, the believers that have been given to him.

And then after that we come to this passage where Jesus prays, he says, not only for these disciples that you've given me but also for those who will believe in me through their message.

That's us if we believe in Christ through their message. And so when Jesus prays for us, what does he pray for?

What is on his heart? What does he long for us to be? He longs for us to be united. You can see that four times Jesus repeats that in his prayer.

[16:18] He says, may they all be one. May they also be one in us. May they be one as we are one. And may they be made completely one.

Jesus prays that we would be united as one in Christ, in him, together. And it's not just a united, like the United Nations where people kind of come together but it's being united in someone else.

It's being united in Christ. As Jesus says, you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us. Think for a second just what that means.

Jesus is saying that we should be united, that the church should be united as the Father and the Son are united, as Jesus is united to God. So if you think about it, how are the Father and the Son united?

Well, we know that they were one in purpose, in their love for one another, in their communion together, and, of course, in the mission which Jesus had come to fulfill, the mission of Christ.

[17:37] So then, let me ask, what kind of unity should we have? We should be one in purpose, in love for one another, in our communion together, and in the mission of Christ.

Let me ask you this, what, or how close was Jesus to God? He says, you, the Father, are in me and I am in you.

Jesus and the Father lived, you know, in a mutual kind of indwelling with each other. And Jesus is saying that that's, that's what he's giving to us as well.

Verse 23, he says, I am in them and you are in me. It's a direct contrast. In the same way that God is in Jesus, so Jesus is in us.

And even though he doesn't mention it here, we know from a few chapters before that Jesus has promised the Spirit to come to his disciples. and it is through the Spirit sent by Jesus that Jesus comes to dwell within us because the Spirit takes everything that belongs to Jesus and makes it known to us.

[18:57] So, what that means is that we actually share in the, in some way in the common life of the Trinity. what is the purpose for this incredible unity, this communion that we share together?

Well, the purpose of it, as Jesus says, is so that the world might believe that you sent me, that the Father sent the Son. He repeats that three times. may there be one in us, verse 21, so the world may believe you sent me.

And in verse 23, may they be made completely one, so the world may know that you have sent me. And in verse 25, these have known that you sent me. The purpose for this unity that Jesus prays for is so that the world will come to know and believe that God sent Jesus and that he loves us as he loved him.

It's also so that we will see God's glory in Jesus and not just see it, but reflect it out. That we would be kind of a light shining out, filled with God's glory to those around us.

It's like the moon and we just had Mid-Owner Festival and you can see how large and magnificent the moon was. But of course, it's not its own light that it's shining with.

[20:24] It's shining with the light of the sun, reflecting the sun's glory. The church is like the moon, reflecting the glory of the sun, the light that comes from God.

And we reflect it out into the community. So Jesus came in order to bring into being a new community, the community of the church.

And it's a community not based on race or national identity, but on the shared life of Jesus himself. our community life is brought into the very fellowship of the Trinity.

And that's the case so that we would see God's glory and bring that glory to shine in the world around us. This is the vision, the desire, and the prayer of Jesus that Jesus has for us as the church.

And so when we think about unity as a church, we often look around out in the world and think, oh well, the church isn't really unified.

[21:33] It's, you know, fractured, there's denominations, there's different people that don't get along, so we need to work harder at bringing unity, some sort of council to bring people together.

that's how we will achieve unity. But Bonhoeffer writes that Christian community is not so much an ideal to recognize as a reality, a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

The ground and the strength and the promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone. It's a reality created by God in which we can participate.

what he's saying is that the unity of the church is not dependent upon an organizational or a structural unity, a visible, a visible, unified structure like a Christian United Nations.

And nor will it come about by man-made efforts through dialogue and diplomacy and trying to work it out like that. Rather, it's a unity that is in each of us as Christ dwells within us based on the knowledge that Christ is with us in the same way that God the Father was with Christ.

[22 : 48] It's a unity that we already have that we can choose to participate in and we will if we want to honor and bring glory to the name of Christ.

it is the unity we possess already. You see, look around you and realize that Christ is in the Christian person sitting around you to your left or to your right in this room all around you.

Through the Spirit we have the indwelling of Jesus within us. what are some implications of that?

Well, if you think of each other as people filled with Christ in us, what difference would that make if you saw yourself and those around you this way?

If you think about all the groups of people that we have here at the church from you guys the Nepalese family with us to different types of students high school and university to grads and workers families all the way from, you know, babies to people as young as Tobin.

See, all of us no matter kind of what our stage of life we have Christ within us and if we really believed, right, if you really understood and believed that the Spirit in you is the same as the Spirit in each one of us, would you be able to dismiss a fellow Christian so easily?

[24 : 29] If they were broken, would you cast them aside? If they were sinful, would you judge them unworthy? If they had sinned against you or hurt you in some way, would you hold a grudge and be unable to forgive them?

to live well-ordered lives in God's universe is to live in the light of this reality, in accordance with reality, to live truthfully.

That is the truth that Jesus has come into this world in order to create for himself a new community of people centered around him. And if you're not yet part of this community, then you should know that Jesus wants to invite you in.

And one of the reasons why this community exists is so that people who are not part of it can come and see it and look at it and see the glory of God revealed within it.

What would a church that truly lived by Jesus' prayer in John 17 look like? Well, that's what the rest of the New Testament, especially the epistles, work through and spell out for us.

[25 : 44] And so that's why we read through that passage in Galatians 5 and 6, which gives us a kind of a road map, Paul's road map to community life. And one of the things that Paul continually says, not just here in Galatians, but in many of his letters, is live your lives in accordance to the reality that you already are.

Be what you are. And so he talks about walking by the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5, being led by the Spirit, and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit.

And all these are ways of talking about living that life, which comes about from having Christ dwelling within us, kind of willing out from us, and the results of that.

And he says, I say, walk by the Spirit, you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.

When I've looked at this passage before, one of the questions that I ask is, am I growing in these areas as a Christian?

[26 : 57] We often like to maybe try and set it up as a benchmark that we have to achieve, but I think a better question is to ask, are we growing in love? Are we growing in joy and peace, in patience towards one another, in faith, in gentleness, in self-control, all these different aspects?

How am I doing compared to how I was last year or two years ago or five years ago? Because what Jesus wants from us is he wants us to continue to grow in our Christ-likeness and that's what God is doing in our lives.

So are we a part of what God is doing in the church, in the world, or are we walking our own path? Are we failing to walk by the Spirit and just walking by our own steps?

see in verse 25 we read these words, since we live by the Spirit we must also follow the Spirit.

Since we already have the Spirit within us, since we are alive, made alive by the Spirit of Jesus, so

we also must follow in the Spirit's footsteps.

it's sadly possible to grieve the Spirit and to have such sin in our hearts and refusal to listen to God that we end up walking away or walking a different path to the Spirit.

[28 : 28] But verse 25 says, since we live by the Spirit, we must follow the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. We must live in accordance with the reality that God has given to us. And that means realizing that we're not in competition with one another, for a start.

That's what he says here. We mustn't become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Since coming to Hong Kong, I've realized that it's really easy to get caught up in this game of comparing yourself with everybody else.

Everybody's comparing because everyone's got a different job with different salaries and benefits and housing and all this different stuff. And in some ways, this seems unavoidable because everybody and their circumstances differ.

But Paul says, don't become conceited. And I looked up conceited, and it means excessively proud of oneself or vain. See, the one who is vain must continually push himself up by dragging down those around them that they can drag down, and those that are too high, well, they envy them and wish they were in their position or wish they could pull them down.

But the Christian community should not be in competition with one another. Instead, we are in communion with one another. This person whom you are looking down upon or envying is God's child and has the spirit of Christ dwelling in them.

[30 : 00] And so let the spirit that is in you see the spirit that is in them, and then treat them as you would Christ, for he is the one who is in them. Another way in which the community of believers kind of plays out is in restoration.

Verse 6 of chapter 6. Brothers, if chapter 6 verse 1, Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, washing out for yourselves so that you won't also be tempted.

Carry one another's burdens. In this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Don't look down, Paul is saying, on those who are weak or downtrodden or sinful.

Those who are sinned should be restored gently and the attitude of the restorer is one of humble fear because they know that they too could easily be dragged down the same path. We do this, if we do this, then we carry one another's burdens and we live in accordance to Christ's prayer and desire for the church.

So we see that in the community of God, the relationships within the church are intertwined and we are committed towards one another for our good.

[31 : 21] There is a solidarity within the church. If one hurts, then all hurt. If one falls, then all are affected. want to be. How about this?

He says, modern people usually seek individuality through the severance of restraints and commitments. I've got to be me. I must be true to myself.

The more we can be free of parents, children, spouses, duties, the more free we will be to be ourselves, to lay hold of new and exciting possibilities. Yet, what if our true selves are made from the materials of our communal life?

Where is there some self that has not been communally created? By cutting back our attachments and commitments, the self shrinks rather than grows.

So an important gift the church gives us is a far richer range of options, commitments, duties, and troubles than we would have if left to our own devices. What he's saying is that so often we seek to be the masters of our own destiny, of our own soul.

[32 : 32] And when other people get in the way of that, then the tendency is to withdraw and to be by ourselves. It's one of the reasons why it seems easier for people to communicate on social networking through the internet and media and so on than in real life.

Because in social networking you can control to a large extent the personality or the persona that you appear to be in front of everybody else. And as you do that you are interacting with other people who are also presenting that personality which they themselves have carefully cultivated. And so your carefully cultivated personality is interacting with their carefully cultivated personality. And then once that interaction is finished you can go back to cultivating your personality. personality. It's a kind of a fake version of you interacting with fake versions of everybody else that's out there.

But then when you meet people in real life, when you can't kind of press backspace and erase and rewrite that sentence that you just, you can't do that when you're talking with people. You actually have to think about what you say. Think about the other person. You might have to apologize for things that you say. It's a grating and a rubbing against each other that people are fleeing from into the world of social networking.

[34 : 01] And if the relationships that we're in seem to cause conflict, well maybe God is using these relationships in order to show up our inadequacy, our sinfulness, where we are still lacking.

And without these interactions we would never grow and change. The tendency is for each one of us to disconnect and withdraw when relationships get tough. But I think it's God's way to get us to see our own sinful tendencies when we are placed next to somebody else who shines a light onto our sinfulness.

Paul Tripp has a book called Relationships, A Mess Worth Making. And he talks about messy relationships and the way that humans want to retreat from it.

But the Word of God keeps encouraging us to deal in the muck and the mess of human relationships. One of the things he says is the fatal flaw of human wisdom is that you can change your relationships without needing to change yourself.

And he says that these relationships remind us that relational pain has divine purpose. God wants to bring us to the end of ourselves so that we would see our need for a relationship with him as well as with others.

[35 : 19] Even painful things we experience in relationships are meant to remind us of our need for him. And he gives us an example of that as well. He talks about this time, he talks about like this, he says, conflict broke out between me and my wife the other day in our kitchen.

I was putting dishes in the dishwasher and she was cooking dinner. We both got in each other's way and then got sarcastic with each other. I said, I would hate to get in your way while I load the dishwasher. She replied, I would hate to get in your way while I cook dinner.

What was going on? Each had a desire, well I had a desire to accomplish a task and was feeling rather self-righteous about what a sacrificial husband I was. My wife also had a desire to accomplish a task and was feeling self-righteous about what a sacrificial wife and mother she was. Both of our desires on the surface were good desires. I wanted to help in the kitchen and she wanted to help serve the family by cooking dinner. But these desires quickly turned from good to selfish. I wanted to serve but it had to be on my own terms and on my time schedule.

My wife wanted to serve but she wanted to do it without any distractions. The selfishness showed itself in our self-righteous comments. We both wanted to be recognized for our service and when that did not happen we had conflict.

[36 : 32] We divorced our service from God's glory and the other's good and turned it into self-service. I'll serve when I want to and I want to be appreciated when I do. What tends to produce conflict in your life?

What do you think God typically uses to regain our affections? He says ironically he uses other people. That is one of the blessings of conflict. He uses the difficult seasons in our relationship to allow us to see what we typically live for besides him.

That was the reason for the spat between my wife and I in the kitchen. The only way I could see that sometimes I serve others out of self-glory and self-love was to put my wife next to me in the kitchen.

This is true of all our relationships. God uses other people to mysteriously and counterintuitively rescue us from self-glory and self-love. Why does he do that?

Because he loves us more than we love ourselves. I don't know for you if that resonated or if you've ever kind of found yourself in a situation where you're serving and you're kind of annoyed because you haven't received the recognition that you think you deserve for it.

[37 : 41] That's when service turns into self-service. When sacrifice turns into self-glorifying look at me kind of ism.

Look what I've done. The real motivation for what we do comes from as I said knowing that Christ is within us within each of us and also from thinking about what is coming in the future.

The last two verses we read out in the Galatians passage verses 9 and 10 talk about this. It says, we must not get tired of doing good for we will reap and we will reap eternal life as we said in the previous verse at the proper time if we don't give up.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith. See, a Christian community is a forward-looking community. It is a community of hope because of what God is building in this world, because of what God is doing in the church.

far from being a distraction to working in this life, the hope of the resurrection is a real hope, a motivation and a driving force for working for good in this life.

[39 : 01] Without the resurrection that teaches us that God's future is coming, that God's life is coming into this world and is already in store for us, already prepared, we would easily fall into idolatry because of our workings, because of what we want to build and what we want to see and what we want to achieve in our lives and in the community around us.

Or, if we find that the community doesn't bend our will, then we'll be in despair and we'll be like, oh, this is no use. We would never be able to achieve the things that we want to achieve.

But the reason why we work for the good of all and we don't give up is because of this hope that we have, that God will remember, what we do, that we will reap eternal life at the proper time if we don't give up.

That's why I love Edmund's story. He talks about working with the kids and being involved and I've had the chance to see the opportunity to be involved with that and to see that. And I love the fact that here at Watermark there are different community groups who are working with different organizations, whether it's Barnabas or ICM or different ones, just to get out there and go into the community because we are doing verse 9 and 10.

As we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith. I love that about Watermark. It's cool. But we're not always out there in the community, are we?

[40 : 40] What if we find ourselves alone? And in the times when we are not in the community of believers or if we're alone, say, with non-believers in the workplace?

Bonhoeffer gives us some sobering thoughts. I read some of this before, but he says again, let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.

If you scorn the fellowship of the brethren, you reject the call of Jesus Christ. Each by itself has profound perils and pitfalls. One who wants fellowship without solitude plunges into the void of words and feelings, and the one who seeks solitude without fellowship perishes in the abyss of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair.

If you can't stand being alone, think of Jesus' prayer. Jesus prayed that you would know that he is in you as the Father was in him. And so you are an agent of God to do good and to bring blessing to those around you, including yourself.

If you fear being alone, then realize that the Spirit of God is in you and wanting you to be a blessing to those around you, even to yourself. Bonhoeffer has one last warning for us this morning.

[41 : 57] He says, it may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship and service may still be left to their loneliness. The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur because though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners.

The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered amongst the righteous.

And so we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners. You see, people talk about grace but can communicate legalism if we see the church as just a place for the righteous.

the holy, the with it people, those who've got it all together and not a place for sinners, for the broken, for those who fail.

But we are all sinners. And so the only way for that kind of church to continue is if everybody conceals their sin from one another and turns up. Tim Jester has this article which talks about communities of performance and communities of grace and the way that a performance-driven community can drive out grace.

[43 : 33] A performance-driven community is one where people talk about grace but communicate legalism, where unbelievers can't imagine themselves as Christians, where it will drive away broken people, where the world is seen as threatening and other.

