“That They All May Be One”

The Unity Jesus Prayed For — John 17

In John 17, Jesus prayed to the Father for the unity of His followers. This unity is rooted in the relationship between the Father and the Son, expressed through the truth of God's Word, and intended to demonstrate Christ's love and message to the world.

For a Bible study or sermon, the central passage is John 17:20–23, but several other Scriptures expand on this theme.

1. The key verses in Jesus' prayer

The central prayer

John 17:20–21 (KJV)

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

John 17:22–23 (KJV)

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

John 17:11 (KJV)

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”

John 17:17 (KJV)

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

2. What Jesus specifically prayed about unity

Verse	Emphasis
John 17:11	Unity among Christ's disciples
John 17:17	Unity grounded in God's truth
John 17:20–21	Unity among all who believe through the apostles' word
John 17:22	Unity connected with the glory Christ gives His people
John 17:23	Unity brought toward maturity, displaying God's love to the world

An important observation: Jesus did not pray for unity at the expense of truth. In the immediate context, He prayed for His disciples to be sanctified through the Father's Word (John 17:17), and then prayed for their unity (John 17:20–23).

3. Other Scriptures that explain Christian unity

These passages complement Jesus' prayer and help explain how believers are to live out that unity.

Ephesians 4:3–6 — Unity of the Spirit

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

1 Corinthians 12:12–13 — One Body

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body…”

Philippians 2:1–2 — Unity of Mind and Love

“Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Colossians 3:13–14 — Love as the Bond of Unity

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another… even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Romans 12:4–5 — Many Members, One Body

“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

1 Corinthians 1:10 — No Divisions

“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

4. A helpful distinction for teaching John 17

Jesus' prayer gives us several connected dimensions of unity:

Unity in the truth

John 17:17, 19

Believers are set apart through God's Word, not through the abandonment of biblical truth.

Unity in Christ

John 17:21, 23

Believers share a spiritual relationship with Christ and with one another.

Unity in love

John 17:23; Colossians 3:14

The love of God displayed among believers gives visible expression to their relationship with Him.

Unity as a witness

John 17:21, 23

Jesus connects the unity of His followers with the world's recognition that the Father sent Him.

5. A particularly important companion passage

Ephesians 4:11–16 is especially useful when teaching this subject in a local church.

Paul explains that Christ gave gifted leaders to equip the saints, build up the body, and bring believers toward unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. The goal is spiritual maturity, with the whole body growing together in love.

This complements John 17: unity is not simply people getting along; it involves growing together in Christ, holding to the truth, and functioning as His body.

John 17:20–23

Main idea: Christ desires His people to be united in Him, grounded in His truth, and displaying His love before the world.

Three teaching points:

1. The foundation of unity — God's truth (John 17:17).
2. The nature of unity — our oneness in Christ (John 17:21–23).
3. The purpose of unity — a testimony to the world (John 17:21, 23).