

The Prayer That Started It All

On January 1, 1832, two religious movements gathered in the same place. They shared a conviction about Christ and the Bible, but they also carried real disagreements. In the middle of it all, Raccoon John Smith stood and quoted Jesus' prayer in John 17—reminding everyone that if our Lord prayed for unity, it must be possible. He reached out and shook Barton W. Stone's hand. The room erupted—people embracing, a hymn breaking out on the spot. They later called it “the handshake that shook the frontier.” It all began because one frontier preacher believed Jesus meant what He prayed. The question is simple: Do we?

I. What Jesus Actually Prayed For

- A. John 17:20 - *I pray not only for these, but also for **those who believe in me** through their word.*
 1. He's praying *for us*.
- B. John 17:21: *May they all **be one**, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.*
 1. The Father and Son are distinct. And yet, they're completely one. Not uniform. *One*.
- C. Where this oneness has to start: It starts here. In this room.
 1. Colossians 3:12-14: *Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, **gentleness**, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on **love**, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

II. Why This is So Hard

- A. Uniformity doesn't only show up in big theological debates. It shows up in smaller ways.
 1. The uniformity trap is closer than we think. Now, what does Paul say about it?
 2. Ephesians 4:3: *making every effort to **keep** the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*
 - a) Our job isn't to manufacture unity. Our job is to stop destroying it.
- B. How do we keep it?
 1. v. 2: **humility**, gentleness, patience,
 2. v. 2 - **bearing** with one another in love
 - a) This costs something. It's not passive. It's an active choice
 - b) The question is not whether there is tension ... it is what we do with it.
- C. Philippians 2:3: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as **more important** than yourselves.*
 1. And note, the antidote is not more debate ... it's humility. (v. 3)
 2. Considering the person across the aisle as more important than yourself.
 3. Philippians 2:4: *Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests **of others**.*

III. Church Division Actually Works Against Our Witness

- A. John 17:21: *May they also be in us, so that the **world may believe** you sent me.*
 1. This isn't an internal church matter. It's about our evangelism.
 2. Think about this in a very specific way, i.e., this congregation.
- B. When the world looks at us and sees
 1. Humility where they expected pride...
 2. People bearing with each other, forgiving each other, considering each other more important than themselves...
 3. They see something they cannot produce on their own, which requires an explanation.
- C. And the explanation is Jesus.

IV. As We Close...

- A. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is still standing. It hasn't expired. It hasn't been fully answered yet.
- B. We are answering it. One small act at a time ...for His glory.