



GRACE CHURCH

Making Jesus Known In Our Unity

John 17:20-23

Grace Church | 8.16.20

*"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, **21** that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, **23** I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

John chapter 17 is my favorite chapter in the entire Scripture. In this chapter we get a snapshot into the very heart of God. John 17 is a peeling back of the mystery of the throne room of God. In this chapter we get to be a fly on the wall as God the Son converses with God the Father. Trinitarian layers are pulled back and we are welcomed in as Jesus himself, truly God and truly man, prays for us. His words are so powerful that they hung the stars in the sky, and in John 17 we see him put his words to use for us. He prays for us, and because of his perfect intimacy with God, his prayers are perfectly certain. When we pray, we hope our prayers are answered. When Jesus prays, he creates answers.

Let me give you some background. In verses 1-5, Jesus begins his prayer for himself, that God's promise that Christ might be glorified in his death might come to pass. Then he begins to pray in verses 6-19 for his disciples, praying out loud for them to hear, his last words before he is betrayed by Judas, arrested, and sent to die on their behalf. He prays with confidence for their increased confidence. You can feel the thickness in the air—they may not know exactly what is coming, but they are no doubt terrified. All this talk of death, of leaving... And so Jesus prays for them.

Now we come to verses 20-26, and Jesus shifts his focus. **Look at verse 20.** Who are those who would believe through the word of the apostles? That's *us*. Hebrews 7:25 tells us that our precious Jesus "always lives" to make intercession for us. What this means is that it is his very life to pray for us, to bring our petitions before the throne of the Father. Can we start with this staggering reality? Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the firstborn of creation, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Lord of All, the hope of all the world, the eternal, unchangeable savior, prays for us.



And what does Jesus pray for us? As he prepares for his crescendo moment, the climax of redemptive history, and his soon to-be ascension and exit from the earth? As he kneels down to pray for the church across the ages, he chooses his topic carefully. What is the single, central focus of his prayer, a prayer he prays now in intercession for his beloved church?

He prays for unity.

Last week we asked the question: “how do we make Jesus known in our church”? And the practical answer we gave was simple: in the midst of diversity, we welcome one another in unity as Christ welcomed us. The question today flows further: “how do we make Jesus known in our city and world?” And the answer is simple: “we do it through our unity.” My aim is that by the time you walk out these doors, you will be convinced that the unity you possess with other true Christians is the greatest apologetic for the truth and the power of the gospel. It’s your number one evangelistic weapon.

The reason that the unity of the church is your greatest apologetic for making Jesus known to your neighbors and family and friends and co-workers is because the unity that we possess in Christ is a unique unity. We will go there first, spending a few minutes understanding what Christian unity is according to this text. Then we will spend the rest of our time seeing how that uniqueness works itself out in our witness, understanding what Christian unity is for.

What is Christian Unity?

It’s Universal

Double back to **verse 20**. Jesus prays for unity for who? For all those who will believe in his word by the witness of the Apostles. First, note how *broad* this unity is. We talk often about unity of the local church. The unity Jesus prays for here is not less than that, but it’s much much more. He prays for unity for *all* who will believe in him. Christian unity flows from the revealed word of Christ to the world, meaning this is global, universal church unity. Jesus’ prayer is that those who believe in him through his word, from the day of this prayer until the day of his final return, **verse 21** may all be one. You have more unity, with a true Christian who belongs to a persecuted underground church in China than you do with your unbelieving twin brother. Why? Because Jesus is praying for your unity with that believer you have never met. He’s not praying for your spiritual unity with your mother or brother or best friend who doesn’t believe in him through his word. See church, when we wake up from our individualistic haze and clearly realize that we belong to a body made up of all sorts of believing people in all sorts of times and in all sorts of places, it pulls us away from reductionistic meism and makes us gentler, kinder, more patient, more encouraging, more humble.

The American Civil war was fought between the confederacy and the Union. The union won, so the country was put back together, “unified” again as the “united” states. We have a political union among state borders and lines that was fought over. It’s quite staggering when you think of it: all these different cultural identities in different states with different ways of doing things, and yet



still in some federal sense, unified under one flag. But you see, Christianity laughs at political unity and says “that’s all you’ve got?”. Christian unity is the most staggering expression of unity first because of its universality. It transcends borders and skin colors and even time itself. This ain’t the EU or the UN. Our union transcends human organization in favor of divine organization.

It’s Specific

But notice too the specificity of **verse 20**. “Those who will believe in me through their word.” This unity has limits. Christian unity is not promised or expected from just anyone who says they believe in God, or anyone who loosely associates them with Judeo-Christian values. It’s a unity shaped by witness. Jesus is praying for the unity of all those who *believe* in him through the word of the apostles. We have unity by way of apostolic witness. These men saw and talked and walked with Christ incarnate, and they recorded his words for us in the gospels and applied his words for us in the epistles. Christian unity is founded on the Word of God, which points us to the real Jesus. So our unity is with anyone who takes this Bible seriously, who makes no compromise on the character of Jesus, who don’t put their faith in his morals or his systems or even his church. OUR unity is with those who put their faith in *him*.

This is often a pushback to the idea of Christian unity. We look at Christians who do things differently than we do and we say: “do we really want to unify with *them*? *They* believe weird things about the spiritual gifts, or weird things about the end times. *They* are too socially minded and or justice oriented, or they are too insular and self focused. But Jesus doesn’t make those distinctions. We prays for the Christian camps you might have trouble getting along with, even the ones who tend to give you weird vibes. He says: “I pray all who believe in me through the testimony of the apostles may all be *one*.” Now, even in our city I believe there are churches and self-proclaimed Chrstians who have forsaken the word handed down by the apostles and who have crafted some other gospel with some other Jesus to worship. They exist. False teachers are out there. But generally speaking, we have to remind ourselves that we don’t have the monopoly on Jesus. We are *one* with all who call on the true Jesus by the witness of his word. You don’t have to go to church with them, you don’t have to agree with everything they agree with. But don’t forget that you are *one*.

It is Communal Entrance Into Trinitarian Glory

Look, I haven’t even gotten to the good stuff yet. What makes Chrstian unity so unique? It’s because it’s not based on uniformity of preference or opinion. It’s based on supernatural glory. Peep **verse 22**. What empowers unity among the people of God is the glory which Jesus receives from the Father and is given to us. To be a Chrstian is to be completely engulfed with the glory of God, swallowed up in the triune God. **Verse 21** shows us the nature of this glory.

No way, Jesus. This can’t be right. He says that just as the Father and the Son are *one*, so all Christians will be *one*, because they are in the Son. Jesus is drawing a one-to-one correlation between the intimacy and union he has with his Father and the union we have with one another in him. And in case you were wondering, the union that Jesus has with his Father is inseparable. It’s unshakable. They are of the same *essence*, this is what he means when he says: “you are in me, and I



am in you.” This isn’t a “buddy buddy” thinking, it’s not a shared preference kind of thing. When was the last time you told someone “I’m in you and you are in me”. We don’t use that kind of language, because our vision of unity is far too small! This Trinitarian oneness between the Father and the Son is a dance that goes back into eternity, where they have always been loving each other and understanding each other. And Jesus looks us right int he eye with this prayer and he says: come on it, the water’s fine! Take a dive into Trinitarian unity friends. You can do it, through me.

This jaw-dropping doctrine is called union with Christ. This idea is all over the New Testament: read any of the epistles, notice how many times they say *in Christ*. You see, if we are truly in Christ, we have everything that he has. We get his glory. My wife and I share a bank account, a house, a family, a fridge. But our marriage is just a glimmer of the marriage between Jesus and his church. Jesus is indescribably wealthy, and I don’t mean in the wealth of the world. He possesses perfection... riches and joys we can’t even dream about. And yet if we are united to him, we get all that Jesus gets. His death is ours, his resurrection is ours, his righteousness is ours, his inheritance is ours. On and on it goes. Listen to an old preacher named Thomas Watson put it just right:

“See how rich believers are, they are matched into the crown of heaven; and by virtue of the conjugal union all Christ's riches go to believers... as long as Christ has it, believers shall not want it, he communicates his privileges, justification, glorification: he settles a kingdom upon his spouse for her jointure... By virtue of the marriage-union, the saints are interested in all Christ’s riches.”

That’s glory. That’s what Jesus prays: let my glory be given to them. Let them share in this God dance with me. So let me hit you with this. If in our union with Christ, we share all the blessings of Christ, then we have all we need for unity together don’t we? What is there to divide over, what spoils or riches haven’t already been given freely to all of us without price? How could I harbor any animosity for a true follower of Jesus, when together we have been embraced with Trinitarian arms and glory?

The greatest reality in all the universe is that Jesus could look at you and say “come be with me”. Who are you to deny that reality by looking at someone else who Jesus has welcomed in and say “you can’t be with me”?

It is a Progressive, Future Perfection

Last thing on this point. Make note in **verse 23** Jesus’ prayer is that we would be perfectly one. Now, we all know that when we take a look over Church history and even into the status of the universal church today, it would be hard to describe it as “perfectly one”. And yet, there is a finality to this. Because nothing can snatch us from our union with Christ, all true Chrsitians are as foundationally unified as they’ll ever be. You won’t wake up tomorrow and be less unified to other Christians. So Jesus’ prayer has been answered by his death and resurrection. But it hasn’t been answered fully. We live in what is called the “already not yet.” So when you look out and see the unity of the church in question, don’t lose heart. It’s been purchased, and it’s coming. One day there will be no more strife or dissension or disagreement. And when you see the imperfection of



this progressive, future, reality, remember that unity is not based on lack of disagreement. It's based on a sure and certain reality that is coming for you.

This is Christian unity. It's out of this world. But you may be asking: "wait, isn't this a sermon about mission"? And now we come to the underlying purpose of our unity. Jesus prays that our unity would make him known.

What Is Christian Unity For?

Our Unity Displays the Veracity of the Gospel

Take a look at **verse 20**. Our unity has a purpose: so that the whole world can know that Jesus is the one "sent" by God. This "sentness" is not some secondary marker of Jesus' identity. This sentness means he is really the Christ, the anointed one of God. This sentness means that he really is who he says he is, and that he really is able to save those who call on him by faith. Our entire faith rests on this truth: Jesus is the Christ. Our entire faith rests on getting the identity of Christ right. And where does Jesus say that his identity will be proved? In the visible unity of the church. In other words, Jesus has staked his entire reputation in the eyes of the world on the proof of our unity.¹

What this means is that how we operate and love one another is not neutral. The world is watching. They want to know: is this whole Christianity thing *real*? Is it *true*? And if they look into the church and all they see is uniformity, then they will assume one of two things: either we are at best a spiritualized fantasy football league, or at worst a dangerous cult who forces members into obedience. And so in a church where all we possess is uniformity, the world looks at us and says: no thanks. I don't think Jesus is who you think he is.

If the world looks into the church and all they see is division, well then I think they feel a little more comfortable. This is like home, they think. No one really gets along that well, or they just mask over their disagreements with fake smiles. If all the world sees is division, they will assume we are at best confused, that no one really knows what is going on and all truths generally lead to the same place. But at worst, they will assume that we are close-minded and narcissistic, that we aren't humble enough to admit that we are human and imperfect. Either way, if all the world sees from us is division, they can't assume that Jesus is really who we think he is.

Now comes the sobering part: Jesus goes on in this twenty first verse to say something that always causes me to cringe. If, as Christians, we do not cringe, it seems to me we are not very sensitive or very honest, because Jesus here gives us the final apologetic. What is the final apologetic? 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. This is the final apologetic... We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent

¹ T.J. Tims, Immanuel Nashville sermons



the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.²

Now, what happens when we are unified? What happens when your coworkers, your classmates, your unbelieving family members, your lost neighbors, look closely at our church and our lives and how we interact with other Christians and see true unity? Well when the moment comes and we share the gospel, saying: "Jesus saved me from my sin and welcomed me into himself", then we make more sense. The authority of the gospel message is backed up by the effects of the gospel displayed. And what could be more compelling than a place of unity, a place of peace, a home where you belong, a people to associate with, a seat at the table, an arm to lean on? What could be more appealing to the truth of Christianity than unity?

You see church, everyone is looking for unifying truth. It's why we accept labels when they come. It's why we gather under flags and slogans. It's why we buy t-shirts with logos on them. It's why we have pride for our city or our state or our country or our heritage. We are saying out loud: we want to be part of something. No one wants to be alone, divided in their identity. We want something we can affirm, something we can point to and say: that is true, and I'm rallying around that. And when true Christians rally around in true unity the truth of Jesus Christ, we scream to the world: he is our truth! His power is powerful enough to make a people from all nations and all colors over all time! When the church of Christ shows their unity, it cannot be denied. This in part is why we come every week to worship together. In a normal world, we cannot accept the practice of feeling spiritual presence over computer screens. Every week when you step into worship with the incarnate body of Jesus Christ and come under his banner and his name, you are making a claim of truth. You are saying: this truth is worth gathering for, worth sacrificing for, worth listening to, worth unifying over.

If in 2020 you desire to see men and women in our city come to faith in Jesus Christ who do not now know him, fight for unity. They will believe your truth when you show you believe its power really brings people together. The visible unity of the church displays the veracity of the gospel.

Our Unity Displays the Extravagance of the Gospel

I'd be lying to say it stopped there. It's one thing to believe that something is true, it's another to believe that it is good. Christian unity not only proves that Jesus is true, it proves that he is good, beyond our wildest imagination.

Another blessing of union which Christ prays? It's Love. See it in **verse 23**. "Loved them even as you loved me". Did you catch it? Jesus is saying that the same love that the Father has for him, he has for us. The same love: eternal, neverending, all-encompassing love. Brother and sister in Christ, I want you to know today that God the Father loves you no less than how he loves his only Son. When Jesus is baptized to begin his earthly ministry: the Spirit of God is sent like a dove and the Father echoes from heaven: this is my *beloved* son, in whom I am well pleased. Jesus is

² Francis Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*



reminding us that in him, the Father can no more be displeased with you than he can with Jesus. Have you ever doubted God's love for you? If you understand that you are one in Christ, that doubt will never be able to surface ever again. How could he not love you, if you are in his son, when he loves his son so since the beginning of time?

This is the extravagance of the gospel of grace. Sinners are sent a savior, but not because God resents them. It's because God loves them. Sinners are welcomed to God, not reluctantly, but in holy Trinitarian love. Do you know the simplest way to preach the gospel news? It's three words: God loves you. No no, listen again: God loves you. The message we carry into the world is good news because it says: Jesus is true, and he won, and he is king. But it's great news because we can say: oh, and that same Jesus? He loves you.

We have been swallowed up in God, and this is the truth that will truly rock the world we live in. The world will see this kind of union, and won't be able to fathom it. How is this for an evangelistic appeal: do you want to be swallowed up in the love of God? Do you want to know that nothing can separate you from his love? Come to Christ—repent, believe, and be unified with him, and the same love the Father has for his only son will be given to you.

And look at the purpose of this kind of soul-shattering love in verse 23. “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them.” How do we show the world that God loves his children, a love that they can get in on? By our unity.

Notice too verse 26. This text even ups the ante. Not only is God's love for us the same love he has for us in Christ, but as we are unified to Christ and swallowed up in that love, that love becomes our love. The love is not only directed toward us, but look what verse 26 says again, that love is “in” us. It's part of us. It becomes our love.

In other words, in union with Christ, our definition of love is shattered and rebuilt. No longer is the love we have earthly and mortal. The love we have is like God's love. The love we begin to have, as we become more and more like Jesus, is a trinitarian love, a God-like love. Once again—this kind of love is paramount for Christian witness. When you love as God loves, you begin to see the people of God, the church of God, in a whole new light. You love like Jesus does, sacrificially and freely.

When the world sees the love we have for one another, they will want in. Nothing is more compelling than love. It's our greatest heart desire. Instead of judgement, we are unconditionally loved and valued. And in Christian unity, we have the opportunity to show the world that love.



So friends, let me end with this today. Let's go back to a question, like a catechism if you will.

Q: "how do we make Jesus known in our city and world?"

A: "we do it through our unity."

At our elder retreat in May, your pastors spent time in prayer and did some dreaming. 2019-2020 was a year full of healthy steps for our church. We added over 50 members, we clarified our doctrine and our practice, we signed a new membership covenant. Your pastors believe that God is calling us in the next year to step out of our comfort zones and truly begin to intentionally take the gospel to our neighborhood. COVID will provide unique challenges, but also unique opportunities. People who are far from Christ are hungry for unity, for a place to belong and a truth to hold onto. Isolation takes its toll on communities.

We think this mission will be most effective if it is done in community. We want our neighbors to actually see and experience and feel our unity as a body of Christ. Let me share with you what your pastors believe that will look like in 2020-2021. Within one year (Aug-Aug) our vision is to see three Waco neighborhoods (Brookview/Heart of Texas/Mountainview) and the campus of Baylor University more effectively reached with gospel witness. Using a two pronged approach (city care, neighbor outreach), our aim is to see 40 significant connections with individuals or households who are far from Christ in these target areas.

We have eight community groups, five of which meet weekly in our target areas or within a few miles. We have around 15 families who live in or within 2 miles of the target areas. We have access to the AllAmerica phone application. We have a pre-existing relationship with Crestview Elementary and with foster care ministries in our City (Foster Village, Arrow) and several families in our church who are currently involved or about to be involved in foster care and adoption.

This effort will be led by our CG's. This semester we will be training your CG leaders to help lead you in this vision. We will be hosting several events to help you connect with neighbors in these areas surrounding our church. We will have a weeked where we actually get out and make some of those connections. You will hear more about our plan at our members meeting on October 30th. This will be neighborhood focused, a saturation of Brookview and Mountainview and Heart of Texas with the veracity and extravagant love of the gospel shown in our unity. So if you live in one of these areas, know we will be calling on you in perhaps unique ways. But the whole church will be around you.

Friends, we cannot forsake the mission of the church because a disease has divided our world. We have a supernatural unity that makes Jesus known. Let's use it.

