

The Lord's Prayer (John 17).

Part V-VII

John 17:11, 14-26

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- I. **Jesus' Prayer For Himself: Glorification** (17:1-5).
- II. **Jesus' Prayer for His Followers** (17:6-26)
 - A. **The Recipients of His Prayer** (17:6-10)
 - B. **The Requests of His Prayer** (17:11-26)
 - 1. **Protection** (17:11-13a)
 - 2. **Joy** (17:13b).
 - 3. **Unity** (17:11, 21-23).
 - 4. **Sanctification** (17:14-20).
 - 5. **Glorification** (17:24-26).

Christ's Prayer for Unity (17:11, 21-23).

INTRODUCTION: [ILLUST]: "Die Heretic!" Unity---a virtue so often either misunderstood or misapplied on the one hand or ignored as irrelevant or leading to compromise of the other hand---what a tragedy, especially when the NT places such an emphasis on unity! *First*, Jesus prays for unity among believers at least four times in John 17 (cf. "that they may be one" in vv. 11, 21, 22, 23). *Second*, in the broader scope of the New Testament, there are at least 50 commands to unity (cf. e. g. Eph. 4:3; the "one anothers," etc.). *Third*, three New Testament books have unity as their theme. Galatians emphasizes the unity of all believers through faith in Christ; Ephesians emphasizes the unity of all believers in the Body of Christ; Colossians emphasizes the unity of all believers under the headship of Christ. Truly a subject that is so strongly emphasized in the New Testament deserves a much closer look than it is typically given.

There are two extremes when it comes to any discussion of unity. On the one hand, you have the ecumenical movement, which emphasizes "unity at all costs"; calling for unity where God mandates separation. On the other hand, there is the separatist reaction, which is the "Lone Ranger" approach calling for separation where there should be unity. Often the latter is a reaction to the counterfeit nature of the former. But it is folly to react to the counterfeit by throwing out the genuine! The presence of false concepts of unity should drive us back to Scripture to discover true unity! Therefore, drawing mostly from our Lord's prayer in John 17, our desire is to examine the nature, basis, command, and purpose of unity.

I. The Nature of Unity.

A. **What it is NOT.**

- 1. ***It is not primarily*** _____ . Any union which ignores the biblical basis of unity (cf. below) is WRONG. This is actually disobedience since it joins together what God has separated. Organizational unity is not

precluded, however (cf. "visible" dimension of unity below).

2. ***It is not*** _____. Biblical unity allows for legitimate differences and diversity in the body of Christ.
 - a. *Diversity* in individual giftedness and personality (1 Cor. 12:12ff; Eph. 4:11-12).
 - b. *Disagreement* over secondary matters or matters of liberty not explicitly spelled out in Scripture (Rom. 14:1--15:7, esp. 14:1, 3, 4, 10, 13; 15:7).

B. **What it IS.**

1. ***It is*** _____ (cf. "as We are," John 17:11, 22, also similarly 21, 23; cf. 10:38). Jesus uses the Trinity as the basis and model for unity among believers. So does Paul in 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:4-6. The Trinity is the best illustration of unity amongst diversity.
2. ***It is*** _____. ("that the world may believe . . . ," 17:21, 23). It is a unity which is apparent to the world; therefore it must be visible. Cf. Francis Schaffer's "Final Apologetic." We cannot expect the world to believe unless they SEE visible unity among believers, as it was in the early church (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 44, 46; 4:32-37). There was also unity between churches (Acts 11:19-26, 29-30; 14:26-27; 15:1-2, 27-31). This is one of the marks of a "church on target!"

II. The BASIS of Unity. What is the BASIS of true unity? Is it found in an institutional church (Roman Catholicism)? Inner emotional experience (Quakerism; Charismaticism)? Human reason (liberalism)? NO---if unity is to be *objective* it must be something external to man [ILLUST: "X" on the boat]. There are two sources of unity revealed by Scripture:

A. **The Person and Work of Jesus Christ**

1. ***John 17***: See how many references there are to the work of Christ in this chapter (cf. v. 21, 2, 6, 9, 12, 10, esp. v. 3 [cf. 1 John 5:20])
2. ***Ephesians 2***: See esp. vv. 14-15. Cf. background differences between Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. Acts shows how they were brought together! Too often today focus is taken off the Person and Work of Christ and placed on a peripheral!

B. **The Apostolic Doctrine.** True unity can only be based on the truth of the apostle's

doctrine (Acts 2:42, cf. v. 46). There is no contradiction between the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3) and the unity of the faith (Eph 4:13; cf. Phil 1:27; Jude 3). John 17 notes this truth as well. Christ had given believers the word (17:8, 14) which was the truth that sanctifies them (17:17, 19). They have kept God's word (17:6) in that they believed that God had sent Christ (17:8, 25). Christ also prays for those who would believe on him through their word (17:20). Thus, liberals who call for unity while disregarding or disbelieving fundamental doctrine are the ones creating disunity [cf. Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*]---as are Neo-Fundamentalists who demand agreement on every particular or nondoctrinal issue.

III. The Command For Unity. Some Neo-Fundamentalists assert that because Christ's prayer is not directed to us, believers are not being asked to maintain unity and therefore have no responsibility to maintain or express the unity that Christ prayed for (cf. Pickering quote). Yet this is misleading at best. Certainly Christ prayed this prayer in the hearing of His disciples for a purpose--to instruct them (cf. introduction to John 17). Could one deduce that believers have no responsibility to the *other* things that Jesus prayed for here---such as sanctification and evangelism? That Christ's prayer is not addressed to us is no argument---NO prayer ever is!! The fact is that there are other passages that make it clear that believers do have a responsibility to maintain unity (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 3:15; 1 Pet. 3:8). Especially significant in this regard is *Ephesians 4:3* (cf. "keep" as in Jn. 17:11; same tie-in to Trinity, Eph. 4:4-6).

IV. The PURPOSE of unity.

A. **To evangelize the lost** (17:21-23)---"that the world may believe . . ." As with the verbal preaching of the cross (cf. 1 Cor 1:21), God is also pleased to use the non-verbal testimony of unified believers to draw the lost to Himself. This is a key reason why the unity Christ prayed for must be *visible*. This also explains why so much of the New Testament is given over to addressing problems of disunity: the churches at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10-13; 6:1-8), Galatia (Gal 5:15), Ephesus (Eph 4:1-3); Colosse (Col 2:1-2), and Philippi (Phil 4:1-3) all had problems with this.

Evangelism has a *corporate* as well as an *individual* dimension. A body of many diverse members joined together in unity presents a better picture of God to the world than just one person could. You can't catch fish in a net with large holes in it.

B. **To reveal God to the world** (see John 17:23c; 1 John 4:12). True love and unity are inseparable (Eph. 4:2-3). Love is the central core of the Gospel (1 John 4:7-11)

C. **To glorify God** (John 17:24-26).

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR SANCTIFICATION (17:14-20).

A fourth request that Jesus prays for His followers is for their *sanctification*, or holiness. Like "unity" above, the concept of separation has been misunderstood; therefore some attention must be given to a proper understanding of this concept if we are to understand what Christ was actually praying for here.

I. The DEFINITION of Sanctification.

A. **Negatively:** *It is NOT removal from the world* (v. 15a). Christ explicitly prays that God would not remove believers from the world.

1. *Such a standard of separation is impossible* (cf. 1 Cor 5:10). In spite of that, many believers try to get as far away from the world as they can and become monastic, thinking that living in a hole makes them holier!
2. *Such a standard of separation violates the Great Commission*, which is implied here (17:18) and made explicit later (20:21; cf. Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8). There is NO IMPACT without CONTACT! Moses, Elijah, and Jonah all asked to be taken out of the world, and in each case their requests were denied (Num 11:15; 1 Kings 19:4; Jon 4:3, 8). On the other hand, Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 1-2; 4-6), Nehemiah in Persia (Neh 1-2), Joseph in Egypt (Gen 37-50), and the saints in Caesar's household (Phil. 4:22) demonstrate that "God intends for his followers to be witnesses to truth in the midst of Satanic falsehood" (Blum). For though removal from the world "would secure their own safety, would leave the world unblessed by their testimony" (JFB).

B. **Positively:**

1. **It is a qualitative difference from the world's values** (cf. vv. 14, 16: "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"). Believers have always been called upon to be distinctively different from the world around them. What was true for the Old Testament (Exod 19:5; cf. Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psa 135:4; Mal 3:17) still holds true for the New Testament (Tit 2:14; cf. Phil 2:15; Col 4:5; 1 Thess 4:12).
2. **It is an abstinence from evil** ("but to keep them from the evil one," v. 15b). This is probably a reference to Satan (Matt 5:37; 1 John 5:19; cf. 2:13f; 3:12; 5:18), who will do everything possible to destroy believers (Rev 2:10;

12:10) by tempting them to sin. It is not enough for believers to submit themselves to God. They must also resist sin.

3. Biblical separation can be defined as a "distinctiveness of lifestyle and theology." Cf. diagram below.

II. The REASONS for Sanctification. The reasons why Christ prays for their sanctification are essentially the same as the reasons why He prays for their protection:

- A. **They are worth keeping**, "because I have given them thy Word" (v. 14a).
- B. **They need keeping**, "because the world has hated them" (v. 14b). The world had continually demonstrated its' hatred for all of what Christ stood for (1:10c; 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 15:18-19; 16:20, 33), so naturally this hatred would also be directed to those who are His followers (v. 14; cf. 15:19).

III. The MEANS of Sanctification.

- A. **The Word of God** (v. 17). This both keeps them from the evil (vv. 14-16) and provides the burden of their message (vv. 18-19). The message finds its' source in Christ, who gave it to the apostles, who then passed it along to other men who would be faithful to pass it along to still others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). Earlier, Christ had connected His own Word with truth (8:31-32), Now He identified the Word of the Father as truth (cf. ch. 15:3; Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:13).
- B. **Their mission** (v. 18). That God had sent Christ into the world reverberates throughout this prayer (vv. 3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; cf. 10:36); now Christ Himself likewise sends His disciples into the world (cf. 20:21).
- C. **Christ's consecration** (v. 19): Cf. "sanctify" in v. 17. Since Christ was sinless, His sanctification was not to holiness, but to His death, in order that through it His disciples might be sanctified. The sanctification of believers is inseparably linked to the work of Christ. Their message is a continuation of His message; their

sanctification is based upon His consecration, and their mission is a continuation of His mission.

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR GLORIFICATION (17:24-26).

As Christ had previously prayed for His glorification (vv. 1-5), He now prays for the disciples' ultimate presence with Him so that they might behold His glory (v. 24). The ultimate glorification of the church is pictured in passages such as 2 Corinthians 3:18 and 1 John 3:2.

Christ was given glory by the Father (v. 24e), and He had now given that glory to His disciples (v. 22). That glory is the secret of the unity that is to be manifested among the disciples. He also had experienced the love of the Father from before the foundation of the world (v. 24f), as had the believers (vv. 23, 26). He knew the Father (v. 25), as had the disciples (vv. 3, 6, 26).

In light of all this, Christ asks His Father that these whom the Father had given Him might one day be with Him, that they might behold the glory of God (v. 24), as Stephen himself caught a glimpse of (cf. Acts 7:55-56).

With those words, Jesus closes His prayer, having determined to accomplish that work on the cross which would make every request of His prayer for us possible! May this glimpse in the Holy of Holies of Christ's prayer life cause us once again to reverently bow before Him in gratitude for the great work that He has accomplished.