

Unity

Jn. 17:20-23

I. INTRODUCTION:

1. There are many sad statistics in this world (~105 suicides/day in U.S.; 1 every ~14 minutes; every 4 min 5 children born out of wedlock). Another is that it is estimated there are approximately 41,000 “Christian” denominations and organizations in the world (*Center for the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*).
2. Even sadder is the fact that most people who call themselves “Christians” actually celebrate this situation and even go so far as to claim that all of these denominations are something that meets Jesus’ approval.
3. Is it true that the fracturing and splintering of Christians into a multitude of different sects each with differing doctrines and teachings is taught in the Bible and approved by God? As always, in order to answer our question, we must not appeal to human wisdom (Jer. 10:23), but to the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
4. In chapters 13-17 of John’s gospel we have the record of Jesus’ final evening with the 12 apostles (washed their feet, foretold His death and resurrection, identifies His betrayer, warns disciples they will abandon Him, institutes the “*new commandment*” (13:34-35), reveals the Father, true vine and the branches, warns the apostles of the persecution they will receive, promises the Holy Spirit or Comforter, etc.).
5. This interaction is drawn to a close in chapter 17 which records the true Lord’s prayer.
6. Being the Lord’s final word to His disciples, one can be assured the words of Jesus’ prayer are very important and deserve our most careful consideration.
 - A. In one portion of His prayer (v. 11) Jesus prays for the 12 that they “*may be one as We are.*”
 - B. Then in verses 20 through 23, Jesus prayed that all His people might be united. Let’s read Jn. 17:20-23:
“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”
7. Jesus had a deep and sincere concern for His apostles.
 - A. These were the men He had chosen to reveal the truth through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), and then these same men were to take the truth into all the world; a world ever hostile toward the truth, and a world ever filled with temptation. Note His concern (Jn. 17:15-17):
Jn. 17:15-17: *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth!”*
 - B. However, Jesus was not only concerned about the immediate needs and welfare of the apostles, because He extended His prayer to all who would become believers “*through their word.*” (v. 21)
 - C. Jesus was thinking about and praying about **US** - Christians today...and His prayer was, “*that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in you, that they also may be one in Us...*”
 - D. That’s a prayer for unity! And, I believe you will agree, whatever Jesus prayed for (especially on His last night before His death), is something we should: 1) have an intense desire to see that it is fulfilled, and 2) tirelessly work toward that fulfillment!
8. But, before we can desire something and work for it, we must first become acquainted with its nature.
 - A. What is this unity Jesus prayed for? He describes it for us. He describes it by paralleling it with the oneness or unity He enjoys with the Father.
 - B. **Listen again:** *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us.”* (“as” is an adverb of “manner”; therefore, in the same manner as the Father and Son are united, Christians are to be united!)
 - C. So, the more we learn about the unity of Jesus with the Father, the more we learn about the unity we as His people must desire and work for.
 - D. So this will be the main point of our study: To become better acquainted with the unity of Christ with the Father...because that unity illustrates the unity we must strive for.
 - E. There are three simple points we need to understand about the unity between Christ and the Father. They are:
1) *One in Will*, 2) *One in Word*, and 3) *One in Work*.

II. DISCUSSION: *the Father and the Son are...*

I. ONE IN WILL

A. Can you imagine an argument between the Father and the Son?

- (1) Given what we know already about God, and given the testimony we have about Jesus, can you imagine an argument or a battle of wills between the Father and the Son?
- (2) I cannot even begin to picture that!
- (3) I cannot visualize Jesus wanting one thing, and the Father wanting something else; and then some kind of heated discussion taking place.
- (4) I cannot visualize this! Why not? Because I know the Father and the Son are **ONE IN WILL**. How do I know? Because

Jn. 4:34: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'"

Jn. 5:30: "I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

Jn. 6:38: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

The evidence and testimony are incontrovertible and undeniable: The Father and the Son are one in will!

B. They are *one in will* because they do not argue about their differing desires, because their desires are **always one** and the same.

- (1) There are no heated discussions about how to compromise the will of one with the will of the other – *because they are one in will!*
- (2) God the Father and God the Son are the ideal, they are the perfect and genuine illustration of what Jesus wants His people to have:

"...that they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in you, that they may be one in Us..."

C. Someone may ask: *How can we be one in will?*

- (1) In this local church, for instance, we have ~35-40 members, 35-40 people who have obeyed the gospel and have agreed to work and worship together: *How can we be one in will?*
- (2) Just thinking about that question; it seems an impossible dream: 35 people, one in will; how could you ever even hope to accomplish that?

D. The answer is given in our text: Listen again to verse 20: "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word...*"

- (1) Did you hear that phrase, "*through their word*"?
- (2) We become believers through the word of the apostles, because they were guided into "*all truth*" by the Comforter (Jn. 16:13). And we unite in will the exact same way!
- (3) If I am determined to submit my will to God's will I will want to do just what "*their word*" says, and you will want to do just what "*their word*" says - we have a basis for unity; we subscribe to a *common standard* and we *want (will) the same thing...the truth!* (Orchestra example)

E. As a member of the Westside church of Christ - each one of us should want one thing: *That which the Word of God teaches about the local church and about God's people. It is simply putting Paul's command in action:*

Col. 3:17: *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

- (1) If I want (will) what the Word teaches, and only what the Word teaches - regarding **worship**, and you want (will) the same thing; we are one, as the Father and Son are one.
- (2) If I want (will) just what the Word says; e.g., about the **work** or **organization** of the church, and you want (will) the same thing; we are one, just like the Father and Son; and we have what Jesus prayed for.
- (3) If I want (will) just what the Word says; e.g., about **morals**; about **marriage**; about **behavior** and **attitudes**; and you want (will) the same thing, we are one and this is what Jesus wanted.

F. But on the flip side:

- (1) If you want (will) what the Word says, and I want (will) my own way; I'm sowing the seeds of division.
 - (2) Or, if I want (will) what the Word says about the work of the local church; and you want (will) to meet some worldly standard; we have a problem, and Jesus's prayer will go unanswered.
- G. So we can see that unity of believers is not really complicated!
- (1) Jesus prayed that we might be one, as the Father and the Son are one.
 - (2) They are one in will, and we can be one in will **if our will is to do just what God wills!** (i.e., what His word says!)
 - (3) Think about it: *Where there is a conflict of will in a local church, or between believers, somebody's will isn't being governed by God's Will! Somebody, unlike Jesus, is not submitting his will to the will of the Father!*
 - (4) And regardless of how much the people may ballyhoo their "Ecumenical Movement," their "World Council of Churches," their "New Unity Movement," regardless of their pleas for unity on the basis of: "If we agree about the Lordship of Jesus, we can disagree about everything else!" Their search for unity on any other basis other than our unequivocal submission to God's **WILL** is fruitless. Such human schemes may produce a "union" but it is man's kind of unity, a false unity, an agreement to disagree. It is not the kind of unity Jesus is talking about! Union is not Unity!
- H. We can be right about a lot of things and still be lost! We must completely submit our will to His will! (experiences studying w/others); Matt. 7:21-23 (e.g., Colleen Cerak; *Mistaken Identity: Two Families, One Survivor, Unwavering Hope*; crash in April, 2006; 1,400 people attended her funeral; 6 weeks later) Does Matthew 7:21-23 describe us?

2. **ONE IN WORD**

- A. Based on what we know of the Father and the Son we cannot imagine *the Son saying one thing, and the Father saying something else.*
- (1) Because from what we know of the nature of deity and the person of Christ we are unable to visualize a debate between Him and the Father.
 - (2) So, not only are they are one in will, they are also One in Word.
- B. From the book of John listen to this is His testimony.
- Jn. 3:34:** *"For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."*
- Jn. 14:24:** *"He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."*
- And in our text:
- Jn. 17:7-8:** *"Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 'For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me'."*
- This is the unity there is between the Father and the Son: They are one in word because they speak the same thing!
- C. As Christians today this is our model; it is what we must strive for: speaking the same thing.
- (1) When this isn't the case there is the evil of division, with all the negative influences and destruction that it produces.
 - (2) And I know some of you may already be thinking about the spectacle of division Paul addressed in Corinth, and you may be remembering his words:
- 1 Cor. 1:10:** *Now, I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, **that you all speak the same thing**, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
- D. This is the way it should be; but again, someone will inquire: *How can we have this unity, how can we possibly speak the same thing?*
- (1) The answer is very simple. If when I preach and teach I speak nothing but the Word of God and if all of you, as members of the local church, share the same commitment; the result is: We speak the same thing.
- 1 Pet. 4:11:** *If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. Use John 10:1-5; 8:31-32*

- (2) Certainly we have differing personalities; there are different ages, sexes, different levels of spiritual growth and knowledge; *but we can still speak the same things, based on our common commitment and loyalty to God's Word.*
- (3) Over the years I have studied the Bible with many, many people. I think without exception all of them claimed two things: 1) They followed the Bible, and 2) They loved God. Yet 90%+ reject plain Bible teaching (e.g., necessity of baptism, a cappella singing, oneness of Christ's church, direct operation of the Holy Spirit). Remember Colleen Cerak? 1 Cor. 2:9-13; Isa. 8:20; Matt. 15:13-14; 7:21-23
- E. So the Father and the Son are one; they are one in will, they are one in word. This illustrates the oneness we should have, and can have in answer to Jesus' prayer.
- F. Even Jesus and the Holy Spirit follow 1 Peter 4:11! Jn. 8:26; 12:49; 14:10; 16:13 If Jesus and the Holy Spirit followed this principle to a "t," who am I not to do so!? Who is Colleen Cerak not to do so!
- G. Application: If we have the will to do His will, our will will be to follow his word: 1) Music (Eph. 5:19), 2) Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), 3) Resurrection (Jn. 5:28-29).

3. **ONE IN WORKS**

- A. It is not necessary to leave the book of John, to see the Father and the Son united in work.
Jn. 4:34: *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."*
Jn. 9:4: *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."*
 And in our text:
Jn. 17:4: *"I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do."*
- B. There is no battle, there is no debate between the Father and the Son over what is to be done; they do the same work.
- C. Remember what this is all about; don't overlook what Jesus is talking about and why He brought this up.
 (1) He is praying for us; for Christians today; for those who have believed in Him through the word of the apostles (Jn. 17:20: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word"*).
 (2) His prayer is that we might be united, and *He is describing the kind of unity He wants us to have: The same kind of unity the Son has with the Father!*
 (3) *They are one in will; they are one in word; and they are one in works.*
- D. This is the kind of unity we ought to have; believers today should be one in will; one in word; and one in works.
- E. But we live in an age where diversity of doctrine is celebrated, compromise is deified, and absolute truth is ridiculed (even by "Christians"! *So, it's extremely difficult to impress people with the concept of the unity Jesus prayed for.*
 (1) I fear many have just accepted division in the name of diversity; and they minimize or downplay what Jesus prayed for; they certainly don't take it seriously! **Gal. 1:6-9
 (2) **TO PUT IT PLAINLY:** here is something Jesus wants, but "Christians" just sort of look the other way. We can't sweep doctrinal differences under the rug and expect them to go away or think we've dealt with them! Repeat! Only leaves a lump under the rug that we will eventually trip and fall over!
- F. Let's listen to Jesus again:
Jn. 17:20-23: *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*
- G. This is Jesus' prayer: John 17:21: *"that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us"*
- H. **ONE IN WILL, ONE IN WORD, ONE IN WORK:** this unity describes what should be among believers today! It is not a mere suggestion it is not optional!
- I. It is critical to note what is at stake! *"that the world may believe that You sent Me" and "that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."* A church shattered and fractured by division has little to

no chance of reaching the lost with the gospel! Much less providing an environment where individual Christians can grow to the maturity needed to make it to heaven! (Deckerville)

4. **ACHIEVING UNITY:** Now, suppose we look at what Jesus wanted - then we look at what reality is today, among believers; and we can come to only one conclusion: *we don't always have what Jesus wanted! So what do we do about it?* {I would like to say - there is something we can do toward the ideal Jesus wanted. There is something we can do, as families...as a local church...as individuals.}

A. **AS FAMILIES**

- (1) We need to think seriously about the souls of our children, grandchildren, etc.
- (2) Will there be a church of Christ here and will it be one where our children/grandchildren can worship faithfully according to the Scriptures? Will there be a group of brethren here to support and assist them making it to heaven?
- (3) Are we doing all we can to help encourage and prepare young men and women to take an active role in the services (also preach), to teach our children the truth, to set an example of following the truth in their lives regardless of the cost, an example where we stand up for the truth and never compromise the truth?
- (4) As families it is entirely appropriate, and I believe *absolutely necessary* to think about the legacy we are leaving (Rev. 1, 2, 3; Acts 20:28-31; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

B. **AS A LOCAL CHURCH**

- (1) We must preach the gospel faithfully (2 Tim. 2:1-4).
- (2) We must join hands with one other only in those things that please God (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 10:3-5).
- (3) We must test everything we believe and do by the Word of God (1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 1:10).
- (4) We must faithfully deal with false teaching as God has directed and administer discipline as directed by God (2 Jn. 9-11; Rom. 16:17-18).
- (5) We must steadfastly resist any outside pressures to bow and compromise with human tradition (Matt. 15:9, 13-14; Col. 4:6; Colleen Cerak! 2 Cor. 10:3-5; 1 Tim. 3:15).

- C. **AS INDIVIDUALS** – we must recognize that when we obeyed the gospel, our obedience didn't just wash away our sins. Our obedience was also a pledge to serve and obey Jesus and carry out His will in every aspect of our lives.

- (1) If we haven't been doing that in regards to unity we need to repent, and do it beginning today!
- (2) My contribution to unity among believers begins with me and it means I take very seriously the pledge of allegiance I made when I was baptized.
- (3) If I haven't been taking that covenant seriously I must repent and put myself under the authority of Christ again!
- (4) I must let Jesus Christ be the master of all my thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5); I must let Him tell me what to believe and do about every issue and I must join with nobody in anything that isn't pleasing to Him.

Gal. 2:20: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

- (5) Unity begins with the individual believer!

(a) 1 Jn. 1:7: fellowship requires each of us to *"walk in the light as He is in the light."*

(b) Eph. 4:1-6: unity requires:

- ✓ *"walking worthy...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering,"*
- ✓ *"bearing with one another in love,"*
- ✓ *"endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

The seven ones of verses 4-6 are meaningless without the attitudes described in verses 1-3!

(c) Phil. 1:27: *"conduct worthy of the gospel"* involves unity!

- (i) Our pursuit of unity involves the following activity: “stand[ing] fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Eph. 4:5; Jude 3); it also requires us to “not in any way [be] terrified by your adversaries” (v. 28).
- (d) To pursue true unity we must understand several things (Phil. 2:1-4):
 - (i) The grounds for pursuing of unity: Phil. 2:1
 - ✓ *consolation in Christ*” (The banner of true unity can only fly under Christ! Heb. 1:2; Matt. 28:18; Jn. 12:48; Col. 3:17)
 - ✓ *“comfort of love”* (True love for God requires complete fidelity to His word, 1 Jn. 2:3-5; true love for the souls of men will never compromise the truth! Jn. 15:10)
 - ✓ *“fellowship of the Spirit”* (Holy Spirit has revealed “The things God has prepared for those who love Him.” 1 Cor. 2:9-10 It is only through the Spirit’s revelation that we have access to God, Eph. 2:18)
 - ✓ *“affection and mercy”* (If we have any compassion for what men like Paul went through to deliver God’s word to us and/or affectionate sympathy toward one another—we will heed Paul’s plea! 1 Thess. 2:1-9)
 - (ii) Attitudes essential to unity: Phil. 2:2
 - ✓ *“being like-minded”* (Amos 3:3)
 - ✓ *“having the same love”* (Matt. 5:6; Jn. 14:15)
 - ✓ *“being of one accord”* (“united in spirit,” NASV)
 - ✓ [being] *“of one mind”* (“intent on one purpose,” NASV)
 - (iii) To perfect these attitudes essential to unity requires each of us to put others first! Phil. 2:3-4
 - ✓ *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit”*
 - ✓ *“but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself”*
 - ✓ *“Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

(1 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 12:3); 2:3-4 is the “filter” through which we must require all of our thoughts, words, and actions to pass through. It is truly a rare quality of character requiring our fullest measure of diligence.
- (e) Furthermore, the humility we must exhibit is exemplified by Jesus! 2:5-8 (explain depths of His humility). Ironically, humility is something we admire and praise in some of our heroes, but so few are willing to emulate!

This is the key to unity! It is the mortar that holds the entire structure together! If each of us does not constantly work on his/her own character to develop the humility of Jesus we will never achieve true unity!

III. CONCLUSION:

1. Let us read His words one final time: **Jn. 17:20-23**
2. Jesus and the Father are one; one in will, one in word, and one in work.
3. Jesus provides the only prescription for the religious division and strife so rampant in this world: We can only unite when:
 - A. We submit our will to His will,
 - B. When we follow only His word and not our wants and desires, and
 - C. When we forsake what we think needs to be done and do only what He says is to be done and do it only in the way He says to do it.
4. How about us?

Adapted from a sermon by Warren E. Berkley