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### **What Jesus Prays For – Our Unity – Part 1**

**Pastor Ty Blackburn**

**John 17**

**September 20, 2015**

Please turn with me in your Bibles to John 17. We turn to the High Priestly Prayer we were looking at two weeks ago. I do appreciate our Associate Pastor, Steven Gaines, preaching last week on short notice with a health issue I had. It is such a blessing to have a man that can handle the Word that quickly, and is ready in season, and out of season, as the Scripture says. John 17, the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus, we have been looking at this prayer for a number of weeks, the prayer that Jesus prays the night before He is crucified. It is called ‘The High Priestly Prayer’ because, in the strictest sense, Jesus does what the high priest did. The high priest would pray and then make an offering on the Day of Atonement. So the sense was, you pray, and you make the offering. So Jesus prays before He makes His offering on the cross. We have the text of that prayer recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s Gospel.

As we’ve been looking at this prayer, we observed first why Jesus prays. We talked about the fact that He needed to pray as a true man, though He is true God, He is fully God, He is also fully man, and as man He prays because men ought always to pray, and not to faint. We said, *Why does He pray?* and then we looked at, *For Whom Did He Pray?* We noted that He prays for a specific group, the people who belong to Him, those who have been given to Him by the Father, repeated again and again in the prayer. Then we began to ask, *For What Does Jesus Pray?* Or, *What Does Jesus Pray For?* We have noted in previous messages three different things that Jesus prays for in this prayer. He prays for our protection, that we would be protected from the evil one. He prays for our sanctification, that is that we would grow in holiness. He prays for our glorification. We’ve looked at these in successive weeks. He prays that we will see His glory, and be with Him where He is. So He prays for our protection, our sanctification, our glorification, and today we come to the fourth thing for which Jesus prays, and the title of the message then is ‘What Jesus Prays For – Our Unity’. This will be a two-part message. So ‘What Jesus Prays for – Our Unity – Part I’. As we read the text, I want you to look for this phrase: That they may be one. You are going to see it is repeated three times in the text and it is actually, except for a translation issue, it is really there four times because the word ‘unity’ is the word ‘one’. You are going to see the word ‘unity’ somewhere along the way as we read as well. So look for that phrase and I would submit to you that this is

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---

the dominant thing that Jesus has on His heart. That is why He repeats it. All the other requests are urgent, and important, they are on the Savior's heart as He prepares to go to the cross, but this is the one that keeps coming up as a refrain throughout the prayer. Let's read the entire prayer, John 17, beginning at Verse 1.

*John 17:1-26 ~ Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, 2 even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. 3 This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. 4 I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

*6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; 8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. 9 I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; 10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are. 12 While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.*

*13 But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the*

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***world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.***

***20 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.***

***22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***

***25 “O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; 26 and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”***

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask that You, by Your Spirit, would work in our hearts. That the Spirit who inspired these words would now illuminate them, and cause them to have the impact in our hearts, and our lives that You desire. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

So 'What Jesus Prays For – Our Unity'. ...***that they may be one...***, Verse 11. ...***that they may all be one;***..., Verse 21. ...***that they may be one,***..., Verse 22. ...***that they may be perfected in unity,***..., Verse 23. Four times He makes that request. Astonishing that He would repeat that again and again. It shows that urgency of this issue on our Savior's heart. We live in a world characterized by division, by discord, disunity. You think about it, every level, on a global scale, wars, and rumors of war continue unabated throughout every chapter of history. Sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less, but always there is war. American society, division of peoples, people groups along ethnic lines, class lines, even religious lines.

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Rodney King's question that he said in the early 1990's, remember the Rodney King issue, race riots in LA, "Why can't we all get along?" We see it in our communities, broken relationships, and our families. How many people in this room have been hurt and damaged by divorce and broken families? What we see in all these particular areas is we see that there is a fundamental problem that is cosmic in scope. The creation itself is out of sync. A fundamental problem that sin brought into the world is disunity, disharmony, dysfunction. We see this in a number of places beyond the scope of this message, but in Romans 8:19-22 the apostle Paul talks about one of the great things that is going to happen when Jesus comes back, and the sons of God are revealed. His people are revealed in glory and that the creation will suddenly return to its former glory. That it is now subjected to futility, that it is in a state of disharmony, slavery to corruption. That it is out of joint, that the creation itself longs for the revealing of the sons of God.

You see this hinted at in different places so that the work of Jesus is really to bring back all of creation in a harmonious relationship of unity, under the headship of God. This is why in Ephesians 1, that wonderful passage that explains the blessings that are ours in Christ. It says in Verse 10 that what Jesus is going to do, that the Father's plan, that His administration of the plan of salvation, from before the birth of time, is the summing up of all things in Christ. It is bringing everything together under the headship of the man Christ Jesus, the God-man. So there is this sense in which the only real harmony that a human being can have, human being to human being, is first of all to have harmony with God. Our problem is we are out of sync with God. We are disconnected from God. We are disunified from God, and therefore we are in discord with others. So the question, "Why can we not all get along?" is because we have to first get along with God. We have to come to Christ, and this opens up for us this wondrous opportunity that Jesus is praying for. That the world, even people know it and they don't know it, is something so fundamental and intrinsic that sometimes it is like a fish doesn't know he is wet.

That in a real sense, that sinners in a fallen world don't understand the reality of what fallenness is. And part of that fallenness, or the essence of it is this disconnect from God, this disharmony that characterizes everything about us. But the Christian is the person who has been brought out of disharmony, out of alienation, from a state which the Bible says really we were warring with God. Romans 8 says that the natural man is at enmity with God, and God was at enmity with us. We were under the wrath of God. We are according to Ephesians 2, by nature, objects of wrath. But what did Jesus come to do? He came to make peace. He is the Prince of Peace and so He, in His own body, establishes peace between God and man.

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Therefore there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Who needs a mediator? Parties who are at odds. And when we come to know God, through the mediator Christ Jesus, we come into harmony with God, and we grow in that harmony with Him. The moment we truly enter into a relationship with Him, we enter into a relationships with every other person who belongs to Him. We are born again, the Bible says. There is a spiritual transformation that happens. It is likened to a new creation. ***Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;...***, 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***...the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.***

Chapter 4 of that same letter, Paul says that what happened at salvation is the God who spoke into the darkness and said, “Let there be light,” has spoken into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and the face of Christ. What He is saying is that when someone is saved, what happens is God almighty speaks into their heart and says, “Let there be light,” and suddenly there is light and life, and the dead comes to life. That new life is a life of connection to God, and that being rightly connected to God then joins us back into the harmony that God originally created in the universe. Then every other believer we are united with. So the opportunity is to show unbelievers, who like fish don’t know they’re wet, unbelievers don’t fully understand just how disconnected they are. They do, but they don’t, and the opportunity for the Christian that Jesus is praying for in His High Priestly Prayer is, “Father, make them one so that the world may believe that You sent Me. So the world may believe that My mission was the mission of bringing all things back into harmony under Your headship, My authority.” That is the opportunity that is before us and so it is incumbent upon us to understand what this unity means, and we’re going to look at it over two messages, Lord-willing.

We are going to look today at the first two points of the outline, *The Essence of Our Unity*, and *The Elements of our Unity*. So today, *The Essence* and *The Elements*. ‘What Jesus Prays For – Our Unity’, and we are going to look, first of all, at *The Essence of Our Unity*.

### 1) The Essence of Our Unity:

The ‘*essence*’ or ‘*nature*’, what is the basic character of this kind of unity for which Jesus prays? Is it something external and institutional? Is it, in other words, manifested, or is it addressed by something like this. For us to obey Jesus’ command here, or His desire, it’s not really a command, He is praying, right? He is praying to the Father for this, but implicit in it is instruction to us. For Jesus’

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prayer to be realized, do we need to abolish all denominations? There are some that have advocated such as that. The ecumenical movement of the last 50 years particularly, “All Christian churches are one. Don’t let doctrine divide. There needs to be a one world church.” But you see the focus in that movement is external and institutional. It is outward. The problem with that is it reflects a complete misunderstanding of the essential character of the unity Jesus is praying for. And I say this because often in that ecumenical movement which focuses on this kind of the one world church idea, they appeal to John 17:21, ***that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.*** The idea is that what is hindering evangelism is division.

I think they are right in a sense, but they are wrong in their application because they are thinking in external forms. It’s not that we need to abolish denominations, it is that every true believer across denominations needs to understand that everyone who truly has been born again, and who truly follows Jesus Christ, is my brother or sister. But the question is, who are truly Jesus’ disciples? Because that is who He is praying for. This kind of unity belongs only to those who have come to know Him. The essence of this unity then is not outward, and external, but it is inward, and spiritual. We might even use the word ‘*mystical*’. I use that word advisedly. What I mean is that which we cannot see, which is a mystery to us, but which is in every sense real, and valid, and true. It is invisible. And how do we know that He is talking about a spiritual unity rather than an outward unity? By the repetition of that phrase, ***...that they may be one, just as We are one;...*** All three times where you have the phrase, ***...that they may be one,...***, look at Verse 11, at the end of Verse 11.

***John 17:11 ~ Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.***

It could be translated ‘*just as*’. The Greek adverb there means ‘*in the same way*’. It is a comparative adverb. You have the same phrase exactly in Verse 21,

***John 17:21 ~ that they may all be one; even as*** (And then He goes on to explain our oneness.) ***You, Father, are in Me and I in You,...***

The same word, the same comparative adverb, ‘*just as*’, ‘*even as*’. Verse 22:

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***John 17:22 ~ The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;***

What is the kind of oneness? It is ...***just as We are one***... The character of the oneness, or the essential nature of the oneness for which Jesus prays, is described in the oneness of the Trinity. It is not a merely external, formal oneness, it is an internal and living oneness, spiritual oneness. The unity for which Jesus prays is analogous to the unity in the Godhead. The oneness between the Father and the Son. Think about that. The wonder of who God is, we believe the Bible teaches that God is one God in three persons. That is mystical, mysterious, it is beyond the ability to comprehend. How can God be one in three? I don't know, He is. He doesn't ask us to understand it, He asks us to believe it. He is, He is three persons, eternally existing in three distinct persons. The Trinity, God is relationship. The most beautiful thing in the world, it shows you, in the very being of God, there is so much instruction for us. What is it that matters most in life? Accomplishment? Well, accomplishments are important. They are very important. Doing good things, yes, but what is it that matters most in life? I would submit to you it is relationships, because God Himself is relationship. The highest order of being, at the highest order of being, God Himself is relationship. The Father loving the Son, and delighting in the Son. The Son loving the Father, and delighting in the Father. And the Son sending the Spirit, delighting in the Spirit. The Spirit glorifying Christ, loving Christ. It is all about relationship. That is why the whole law could be summed up by Jesus in two commands. Isn't that amazing? They come asking Him, "What is the greatest commandment?" They think that they are going to get Him, they are always thinking they are going to get Him, the Pharisees, or the Sadducees, coming to trip Him up. "What is the greatest commandment?" And He didn't pick one of the ten, He picked the biggest commandment from Deuteronomy 6:4.

***Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ~ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.***

Jesus said, "That is the first and greatest commandment. It is not about don't murder, the first and greatest commandment is love God with everything that you are. You don't live before God in a religious sort of exercise. You love God." That is relationship, and what did He say. He said, "Let Me just tell you while I'm at it, the second is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself." And then He says, "On these two commandments hang the whole law and the prophets." Two relational

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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---

commandments. If you love God, and you love your neighbor, you keep the law. So it is relationship.

And so Jesus has always, God has always been about relationship, and so He says, “Listen,” as He is praying to the Father, “What I’m praying for Father, is the character of their relationships. I pray that You will make them, and keep them one. Keep them in this oneness that they have been born into.” So it is a unity, the essence of our unity, it is a unity that is not produced by human effort. It is the creation of God. It is a spiritual unity produced by the Holy Spirit. The analogy would be, in a sense, that we don’t choose our families, you’re a brother or a sister to the people that you are a brother or a sister to because you were born into that family. There are familial bonds that are just intrinsic and there.

I remember from time to time we will visit, you know you see a cousin or something that you haven’t seen in 25 years, or maybe you’ve never seen. You meet them and you are like, “Oh, we’re related,” and you talk for a little while, and often you will find there is just this connection. Even though you are very different, and maybe you are trying to find out where they are spiritually or whatever. Maybe they are not a believer, but I still feel this connection to them that they are family. Blood is thicker than water. Now spirit is thicker than blood, but the analogy holds. In the same sense, when you become a Christian, you don’t choose to be born again. You didn’t choose to be born, and you don’t choose to be born again. I mean, you have to repent and believe, but it is because the Spirit of God has come in and opened your eyes, and your heart. God gives you the new birth. And so when you are born again though, you are born into a family. You didn’t choose to be in the family you are born into, but if you truly have been born again, and you get around other believers, and now listen, there is so much working against our unity, but if we can strip away, and we can work at it properly, we will see that there is a unity there that isn’t produced, it is kept.

The passage I read earlier from Ephesians 4 echoes what you see in John 17. John doesn’t say, “Help them produce unity. Help them organize for unity.” He basically is praying for a spiritual unity to be manifest in them. Do you remember in Ephesians 4, that we read earlier for our Bible-reading time, he says, “Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.” You don’t make the unity, you preserve it, you guard it. It is already there and that is the reality. That if you truly belong to Jesus Christ, and the other person truly belongs to Jesus Christ, then you truly belong together. Now, that is *The Essence of Our Unity*. Now let’s talk about *The Elements of Our Unity*. *The Essence of Our Unity* is



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spiritual, inward, an act of God, for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.

### 2) The Elements of Our Unity:

Now, secondly, *The Elements of Our Unity*. As I said, we don't create our unity, we preserve our unity. We allow God to manifest what is already there. And I think it's instructive when you look at this passage carefully, that you see that there really are three sub-points under *The Elements of Our Unity*. There are three things, and these aren't elements that make up unity, as much as they are elements that foster or promote our unity, or preserve our unity. There are three elements that help to preserve our unity, and they are ironically the three things that Jesus has already prayed for. He prays for our protection, we said, and I submit to you that He prays for our protection so that we may be one. He prays for our sanctification. He prays for our sanctification so that we may be one. He prays for our glorification. He prays for our glorification so that we may be one. That's why I think it's repeated three times explicitly, and then the fourth time when He says, "...that they may be perfected in unity." Let me show you this. Verse 11, that's where we see Him praying for our protection.

***John 17:11 ~ Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, (so) that they may be one even as We are.***

Do you see that? "Keep them, guard them, so that they may be one. They needed to be protected so that the oneness will manifest itself." And the same thing in Verse 17:

***John 17:17 ~ Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.***

I think as you follow the flow of thought, in Verse 19 He's talking about His own sanctification

***John 17:18 ~ 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.***

And then He transitions to the broader group, but I think He's still praying for the same thing, for sanctification. He says, "I'm not asking on behalf of these alone,

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but I'm asking for the sanctification also of those who will believe in Me through their word. Look at Verse 21:

***John 17:21 ~ that they may all be one;...***

So sanctify them that they may be one. And look at Verse 22, glorification, showing glory:

***John 17:22 ~ The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;***

Do you see that? Glory leads to oneness, holiness leads to oneness, and protection leads to oneness.

This is really instructive, because it helps us understand how we often think intuitively to wrong conclusions about how we would be one. I mentioned earlier that it's often said doctrine divides, and you hear the argument. There are so many denominations, and there really are, it seems like, in the last 200 years, there's just an explosion of denominations, and there has been. And much of that, or a good portion of that, has been ridiculous and wrong. But there really are fundamental reasons to have separate denominations. I mean, we have a baptismal because we baptize believers. We don't baptize infants, but there are wonderful brothers in Christ who believe in baptizing infants. I went to seminary with Presbyterian brothers. I'm so grateful for my education at Reformed Theological Seminary. It was fantastic theological education, but I had to disagree with their position on infant baptism, and therefore I could not become a PCA minister. They don't appreciate PCA ministers trying to dunk anybody. I mean you sprinkle. So we have to divide our church, as far as our practice on a regular Sunday, but my dearest friends in ministry are PCA brothers, and I love them, and would stand by them in any moment, because they love Christ. They love His word. Do you see that? So the denominations, there has to be some, because there are things like that. But the key issue is the core matter.

Before we continue on, let me just say a word about this protection and how it relates to that. The first thing we're going to look at under *The Elements of Our Unity*, the first unity is protection. The second is sanctification, and the third is glorification. And what I want you to see is that in every circumstance, what you have is there's movement away from something, towards something, and that as you move away from that which is harmful, toward that which is good and right, unity is fostered. It's not created. It's just enhanced. Our experience of it becomes

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deeper. But first, our protection. To be protected, what Jesus is talking about here when he says, “Protect them,” in Verse 11, “Keep them in Your name. Protect them. Guard them.” And then He repeats the word in Verse 12. “I have kept them in Your name.”

***John 17:12 ~ While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.***

Then Verse 15:

***John 17:15 ~ I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.***

Keeping and protecting from the evil one—how is it that Satan attacks? How does Satan deceive? How does Satan destroy? We’ve talked about already as we looked through John’s Gospel, Jesus said in John 10 that Satan the enemy comes to steal, and kill, and destroy. How does he steal, and kill, and destroy? He says in John 8, “He’s a liar and the father of lies.” Satan is a deceiver. He lies, and he lies about God. That’s his primary way of lying. That’s what he did in the Garden of Eden. He said, “God is not good,” basically. That’s what he said. In other words, “You can’t trust God. He’s not for you, because He is a liar.” And so what is it that brings us closer and closer to one another? It’s when we understand truly who God is, when you move away from error to truth, when you’re protected from Satan, from his error, because he disguises himself as an angel of light. He is the one who is the architect of the spirit of anti-Christ that brought up all kinds of false teaching in the New Testament. You see they’re dealing with false teachers immediately. It’s astonishing, actually.

If you think about the New Testament church, it was so hard to become a Christian, in a sense that it could mean death. It certainly meant for the Jews that accepted Christ, it had tremendous impact on their family relationships. They were disowned for following Christ, and yet Satan in his great evil, he’s a counterfeiter, and so he began immediately propagating false doctrine, people who were not true believers but who were deceived, but who were willing to call themselves Christians. We see epistle, after epistle, after epistle talking about the false teachers that have come in. Don’t listen to them. Cling to the truth. It is the truth that keeps you.

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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He said in that passage we read earlier, “Don’t be like children, tossed about on the waves of doctrine, and the deceitfulness, and the craftiness of men.” That divides. False teaching divides. It is the truth that unites. So the statement, “Doctrine divides,” is not accurate. True doctrine unites. Doctrine does separate. Doctrine separates the false believer from the true believer, because Jesus has said that the people He’s praying for are those whom the Father has given Him. How do you know those whom the Father has given Him? Look at Verses 8 and 9 of chapter 17:

***John 17:8 ~ for the words which You gave Me I have given to them;...***

And what did they do with word that He has given them?

***John 17:8 ~ ...and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.***

What is it about the person who has truly been born again? He receives the word of God and he believes the word of God. He receives the testimony of what Jesus has done, who He is, and he believes it. He receives the fact that Jesus has come into the world to save sinners. He doesn’t reject that. There are many people who profess to be Christians, who reject the Gospel, the way of salvation. And so you find again and again in the New Testament, like the epistle of Galatians, where Paul makes this astonishing statement in Galatians 1:8. Actually, in Verse 6 he says—he’s writing to a church he planted. He went into the area of Galatia preaching the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. He was preaching the Gospel that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, that is, that it’s by faith apart from works, that we’re saved by faith and then the works follow. He was preaching that Gospel. He goes away to another place to minister more, and he hears about the churches in Galatia, that they’re being deceived, that false teachers have come in, and they’re preaching another gospel. Now, they’re saying, “Yes, believe in Jesus. Yes, we love Jesus. Yes, believe in Jesus. Yes, trust in Jesus. Yes, Jesus died for you on the cross, but add to that circumcision and the keeping of the law if you want to be truly a Christian.” Do you see that? They said, “Yes,” to a whole lot of stuff, but it was what they added to it that was so deadly. Paul says to them in Galatians 1:6, “You foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you? How could you leave the true Gospel so quickly?” He says, “Let me say this.” Listen to these words in Galatians 1:8.

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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***Galatians 1:8 ~ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!***

“If I or an angel from Heaven, should come to you and preach to you a gospel, a way of salvation, if I or an angel from Heaven should come to you and preach to you a gospel different from that which I already preached to you, let him be accursed!” He’s saying, “If I were to come back and preach to you a salvation different than what I already preached to you, let me be sent to hell.” In Verse 9 he repeats it.

***Galatians 1:9 ~ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!***

“Let me say again, if anyone or an angel from Heaven comes to you and preaches to you a gospel other than that which you have received, let him be accursed.” Now, those of us who believe the word of God, that means that God feels that way about the Gospel. It’s not just Paul blowing off steam. It’s God saying that the most important thing in the universe is the way to be right with Him. And then when somebody monkeys with that, they are monkeying with the most precious reality in the universe. And so when Jesus says, “...that they may be one,” He’s saying, “Lord, protect them from all of the error that’s going to come in. Protect them from the liar, the deceiver, and the well-meaning people who have been deceived.” Those who say doctrine divides, doctrine does not divide. True doctrine always unites.

Let me say this. I mentioned earlier I went to school with the Presbyterians and I’m so grateful for that. I went to school at a time where there were no conservative Baptist seminaries, teaching that the Bible was the inerrant word of God. So anyway, that’s changed, thankfully. I think the best seminary now is Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in my opinion. But anyway, that’s an aside. You can talk to me about that later if you’d like to ask me my opinion about that. That was free of charge. But I went to seminary with Presbyterians because I wanted to go to a school that taught that the Bible was the inerrant word of God, and so I went there and I was challenged on all kinds of different things that I had never been exposed to. And as I studied with them, what I saw was they had such a love for the truth and a desire to submit to the truth, that I instantly just grew to love my professors. These were men who loved God and loved His word. You see that the

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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unity was there. It didn't have to be created. I just had to hear them talk, and talk about the glory of Christ and what He did for us at Calvary, to hear them unpack the wonder of what it was for Jesus to bear the wrath of God on the cross, to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And to hear my professors pour that out, my heart was thrilled and I loved them. I still love them dearly and I thank God for them. But when it comes to infant baptism, I think they're wrong. I say that very humbly to some of those guys. They're brilliant men, but I believe that as we look at the Bible, it's teaching that baptism is for believers.

I like what Alistair Begg said in a debate he had with R. C. Sproul over this issue. He said that the argument of Dr. Sproul as well as all the Paedobaptists, that is, infant baptism is immanently logical, but it's not fundamentally biblical. It doesn't stand up to the New Testament. "Believe and be baptized." Anyway, I don't want to get off on that. Let's leave that aside, but say this, that as I heard their argument, though, I gained great respect for it. As a Baptist guy, I'd never heard about it. "What are you doing baptizing babies?" I'd never been around any other Presbyterians. But they have an argument that has a logic and an essential beauty about it. I think they're missing out on it, but still I have respect for it.

Now, think about millennial views. I mean, if we were to talk about if you have a room of four people talking about millennial views, you've probably got seven views, because a couple of them are going back and forth between different places. Why is that? It's because God is not being as clear about some things as He has others. It's not quite as clear about baptism as it is about the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. It's not as clear about exactly how the return of Christ relates to the millennium, whatever the millennium is precisely, how the return of Christ relates to it. Is it before? Is it after? As it is that God is three Persons in one essence. And it's because it's not as clear about that, if we really love the truth, we even understand, "I have to hold the doctrine that I hold, whatever it is, with a tenacity that is proportionate to that doctrine's clarity in Scripture." If it's something that's not that clear, I may have a firm opinion on it, but I ought to hold it a little more lightly and a little more humbly.

I love what John Piper says. He says, "Don't yell where God whispers." Isn't that a respect for the word of God? God chose to be less clear on this, therefore, I will try to whisper where God whispers. And the person who's really been born again, who loves the truth—and it takes time. We're all growing. We're all at different places. Sometimes as Christians it feels like we're in bumper cars. We just kind of bang

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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into each other when we talk about theology, and we've got to work on that. That's not right. We need to love each other. We need to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. We need to value the other person. And so when I was in seminary, I got to hear about amillennialism, post-millennialism, for the first time, and what I saw was even in dialoguing about those things, I gained a greater appreciation for the men who held the views, and the fact that it wasn't so clear as I thought before, and it's okay, because the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. And it's the plain things that matter eternally. We'll find out a lot of things when we get to Heaven, but we will not find out that Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead. And if you don't believe that Jesus rose from the dead in a bodily way, according to the New Testament, you're not a Christian, because Paul said, "If Christ be not raised, our faith is in vain." If they find a body in the tomb that they could really show to be Jesus of Nazareth, then it's time to hang up what we're doing. They will not find that. He is risen.

So the elements of our unity, protection from error, what happens is as we get closer and closer to the truth, even in these different areas where we realize, "I really don't know what my position is." And my position actually on millennial views has changed through the years. I'd be one of those guys helping make it seven views in four people, because it's not as clear, but by talking about it, and wrestling with the text, and loving God, and loving my brother, and listening to my sister, what happens is I get close to them, because I appreciate that they really love the truth and they love the Savior, and they're trying to be faithful to Him. And God has allowed this sense of diversity, not only diversity of theological position, but diversity of gifts, diversity of function, which is analogous to the Trinity. In the Trinity, you have three Persons, one essence. In the body of Christ, we have each unique persons, but we're made one in Christ, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one God and Father over all, who is above all, and in all. So there's this oneness that pervades. So protection from error is the first element.

The second is sanctification from sin. He prays for our sanctification in Verse 17, and then as I said, it carries the thought all the way into Verse 21:

***John 17:21 ~ that they may all be one; even as You,...***

And the idea is that here again it's a movement away from. First of all we saw in protection, movement away from error and deception, to the truth, promotes unity, true unity. A movement away from sin toward holiness promotes unity. It is as I get more and more like Christ, as you put off more and more sin and become more

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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and more holy, what happens is we get closer together. That's what He's saying. "Sanctify them that they may be one." Sin separates. Sin divides. What happened in Genesis 3 when they sinned? The first thing they did is they went and hid from God. For the first time, they felt a need to hide from God. And then what happened when He started dealing with them, they blamed each other, remember? "Adam, what happened?" "It's that woman that You gave me." Some things just never need to change. "It's that woman again. It's that woman you gave me." And then what happens in their relationship? Their relationship basically becomes a power struggle where your desire is for your husband, but he shall rule over you. There is this fleshly, carnal power struggle where there used to be beautiful and perfect harmony. It's symptomatic of what happened in sin. Sin divides. More sin equals more separation, because when I'm focused on myself, when I'm living for myself and my own pleasures, I don't see the other person and their needs. But as I put off sin and put on more of grace, what happens? I see the other person. I can serve the other person, and we get together. I move closer to them. Even if they don't move closer to me, the distance is lessened because I'm moving closer to them.

So holiness, how do you become one? You become more holy. In our marriages, one of the reasons that we're not getting closer in our marriages is because we're not growing in holiness. The old picture that seems a little corny when you first see it is the triangle. Man's over here and the woman's over here, and God's here. As you each get closer to God, you get closer to each other. It's true. As you put off more and more sin, the oneness that is there between two believers comes out more and more. It's enjoyed. It's experienced more. So when the church maintains the purity of the church through even things like church discipline where you go and talk to a brother or sister who's in sin, which we've talked about before, is done very differently than the world expects. It's really done out of concern and love for a brother or sister. "I see a danger. Something's going on. What's going on in your life? Let me understand. Let me help." That's love done rightly. It's not done to exclude or to push away. It's done to draw back. But when someone does end up going through church discipline of being excluded from the fellowship, what's happened is if there's division, it's been caused by the sinner, not by the body. They've separated themselves. The church just recognizes what they've already done. And listen, even that is a means toward reaching out to them. Say a woman wants to leave her husband, and she wants to marry another man, and believers go to them. One believer goes, and then they keep going and expressing, "Please, what's going on? God doesn't want this." "I just want to be happy." No, your happiness comes through holiness. God will work in this. She won't listen to the one believer, and then two or three believers go, and she won't listen to two or



## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

*Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world*

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three believers. Then it's told to the church and the church goes. She won't listen to the church. Jesus says in Matthew 18, if that happens, He says first of all in the verse, "Where two or three gather in My name, there I am in your midst." The context is church discipline. When two or three believers go to a professing believer who's in sin, and that person won't turn back, they are rejecting Jesus Himself as Shepherd. He is there. That's what He's saying. Look at the context.

***Matthew 18:19 ~ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."***

And if they reject the presence of Christ beckoning them back, Jesus says you must take the final step and treat them as a pagan or tax collector. It doesn't mean you pronounce judgment. We don't know. They could be saved. That's up to God, but he says if you don't see the fruits of salvation, and you're to tell them that, "We're concerned about your soul." Do you even see that that is loving? Would you rather have somebody say, "Hey, it's okay. Go ahead and just go your own way. Forget about what God's word says," and then that person wakes up in hell? No, you tell them, "Listen, this matter is of the greatest importance, because I love you. Please come back." And then the church has to do that. What's happened is sin has divided. Holiness brings together. Now, all of us are sinners and all of us have that division-causing sin in us, and we need to be humble and broken over it. The final thing is glorification. I think what He's saying here in Verses 22 to 26:

***John 17:22 ~ The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;***

***John 17:24 ~ Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.***

That's glorification, our movement to Heaven. What He's saying is that the more that we move away from worldliness and a preoccupation with worldly things, to heavenly-mindedness, the more we will experience oneness. So as we move from error to truth, we become one. As we move from sin to holiness, we become one. As we move from worldliness to heavenly-mindedness and anticipation of the glory of Heaven, we become more and more one. We experience it more. The oneness that's already there becomes evident, and that's what God wants us to do. We're going to talk about this some more next time, and the glory of what that can

## PROVIDENCE CHURCH

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be when God moves this way, and then the unity of the Trinity becomes visible. That is powerful.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer...

*Father, we thank You for the incredible work of Jesus Christ in bringing us to peace with You and peace with one another. We stand in awe of Your great love that would love us when we did not love You, a love that would seek us when we were not seeking You, and a love that would do everything necessary to bring us back to Yourself. We pray that You would be exalted in every heart and in every life. Grant light and life to those who have not known it, and grant more and more life and light to those who already know the wonder of Jesus. May You be glorified. We pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.*

"What Jesus Prays For – Our Unity – Part I"

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