



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

### Sermon Notes

*Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, Part 4*

### The Unity of the Body of Christ

John 17

July 23, 2006

#### BACKGROUND / REVIEW

- ⇒ This is the third prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The others are: (1) at the tomb of Lazarus (11:41-42); and (2) after the Greeks seek Jesus in John 12:27-28.
- ⇒ This third and final prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John is often referred to, appropriately, as the “High Priestly Prayer.” The reason for this is that Jesus performs to role of a mediator, the primary priestly task, praying for Himself and those He came to save.
- ⇒ This prayer can be broken up into three primary sections:
  - \* Jesus prays for Himself (verses 1-5)
  - \* Jesus prays for His disciples (verses 6-19)
  - \* Jesus prayers for the Church (verses 20-26)
- ⇒ This prayer of Jesus is one of those rare places in Scripture where we, as contemporary readers, are given the opportunity to observe the intimacy between the Father and the Son. This prayer further underscores the **distinction** (Jesus prays *to* the Father), yet **equality** (Verse 10), between the persons of the Father and the Son.
- ⇒ One of the primary requests Jesus makes of the Father in this prayer is for the unity of believers.
- ⇒ It is absolutely essential, before we examine this aspect of Jesus’ prayer, that we realize that unity NEVER happens by simply an act of the will. Furthermore, there can be NO TRUE UNITY apart from Jesus Christ. **Why?**
- ⇒ Every organization has unity, and a basis for it, whether it be a common interest or, in the case of a secular company, a common product. However, this is not biblical unity.
- ⇒ Biblical unity occurs **only** in the context of genuine, biblical truth.

- ⇒ One of the primary ways one can determine whether biblical unity truly exists in a church is how the local body approaches conflict, whether it originates ‘internally,’ or externally by means of persecution.

**I. The Foundation / Basis of Christian Unity**

**II. The Characteristics / Nature of Christian Unity**

**III. The Result of Christian Unity**

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**I. The Basis of Christian Unity**

- ⇒ The Will of the Father
- ⇒ The Work of the Son, Jesus Christ: *What* Christ has done
- ⇒ The Sanctification of the Disciples [and all believers] (vv. 14-19)
- ⇒ Eternal Life – KNOWLEDGE of God
- ⇒ The Nature of the triune God – The TRINITY
  - ✧ The Glory of the Son and His followers (v. 22)
  - ✧ The mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Godhead (vv. 21, 23)
  - ✧ Sacrificial Love (v. 26)

**II. The Characteristics / Nature of Christian Unity**

- ⇒ **What it is NOT**
  - Christian unity is **NOT organizational unity**.
  - Christian unity is **NOT measurable** [in terms of efficiency or any other measurement].
  - Christian unity is **NOT a function of size** [If anything, it seems empirically that unity is inversely proportional to size – the greater the size, the lesser the unity].
    - ✧ It is NOT quantitative, but qualitative.

☆ Notice: this is what the **WORLD** values – large, efficient organizations whose productivity and efficiency can be achieved through changes in **human effort**.

⇒ **What it IS**

○ **Unity based upon a common salvation and a common passion and pursuit to KNOW GOD**

- ✳ This is what the people ‘have in common’ with one another.
  - I have often heard people say, with respect to certain churches: “I just don’t have anything in common with anyone there...”
  - But when we make statements like this, what are we *really* saying? What do statements like this reveal about our primary focus of a church?
- ✳ However, when the unity of a church is based upon a common passion to know God, then knowing God becomes the desired END rather than the primary means to other desired ends.
  - Is this not what Jesus refers to in His reference to the *Shema* in **Matthew 22:34-38**:

But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' " "This is the great and foremost commandment."

- And also in **Matthew 6:33**:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

○ **A Common love and passion for the Word of God**

- ✳ This is essential, because, when we are taken *out* of the world, it is the Spirit and the Word which are the instruments, or means, that God uses to sanctify us.

Verse 17: “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

- ✳ During the seventeenth century in Scotland, a movement began which promoted the continuance of Reformed theology in Great Britain, free from the influences of the monarch of England. The people of the movement became known as the Covenanters because of their commitment to a series of covenants in the middle of that century, to include the National Covenant in 1638.

However, what distinguished the Covenanters from the members of the Church of England, was their fierce commitment to the Word of God as their final authority in faith and practice.

So committed were they to this principle, that they took St. Giles Cathedral, a former Roman Catholic Cathedral, and subdivided it into multiple, smaller chapels – erecting dividing walls that separated the different rooms.

The reason for this is that they firmly held to the belief that if everyone in a room could not hear the Word of God when it was preached (of course, without the use of microphones and other modern technologies), then the room was too large.

Why? Because the Word of God was **absolutely central** to their worship and unity. They cared more about the proclamation, hearing and reception of the Scriptures than they did size.

- **Submission to the Scriptures, scriptural authority, and one another**

- ✧ Such submission was perfectly modeled by Jesus Christ, who, although being ontologically equal to the Father, willingly, even joyfully, submitted to His authority.

Verses 1, 4, 22: “Jesus spoke these things; lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do...The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;’”

- ✧ In this passage, Jesus is further emphasizing His obedience to the will of the Father, giving us a perfect example to follow (Read also **Philippians 2:5-11**).

- **Obedience to the Commands of God and Sacrificial Love for one another**

- ✧ This goes back to the ‘greatest commandments’ found in Matthew 22: (1) Love the LORD; and (2) Love your neighbor.

- ✧ Verse 22: “The glory which You have given to Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one...”

- As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, **we share in the glory of Christ!**
- However, it is essential that we understand the nature of that glory.

Referring to Verse 22, Leon Morris writes, “Jesus now says that he has given his followers the glory that the Father gave him. That is to say, just as his true glory was to follow the path of lowly service culminating in the cross, so for them the true glory lay in the path of lowly service wherever it might lead them. The little band and its Master were both insignificant as the worlds counts importance. But the apostles are right with God and therefore they are supremely significant. They have true glory...We have seen often in this Gospel that for Jesus the cross is the true glory. Elsewhere it is recorded that he called on his followers to take up their cross in following him (Luke 9:23). For them, too, the way of the cross is the way to true glory. **The purpose of this given of glory to the disciples is unity.**”

- The late Scottish theologian William Barclay wrote: “We must never think of our cross as our penalty; we must think of it as our glory...”
- The process of sanctification necessarily involves sharing in the glory of Christ (i.e., the Cross). It is this process that ‘uproots’ us out of the world, setting us apart, grounding us, not in the ways of the world, but the truth of God’s Word.

✱ Verses 21 and 26: “...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...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.”

- Notice: the inter-Trinitarian love and unity between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit forms the basis of love and unity in among believers.
- This love was (1) unconditional; and (2) [as revealed by the work of the Son] sacrificial.
- Therefore, our love for one another should be the same. But we must not forget, **such love is only possible if we have experienced the work of the Cross; taken out of the world; sanctified, set apart for God’s use.**
- Then, we will understand (1) the glory of Christ; and (2) the sacrificial love that is linked to that glory.

John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

- Yet, Tertullian, the Early Church Father noted how the pagans of his day marveled at the love of the Christian fellowship, especially as it faced sometimes ferocious persecution, “**See how they love one another!...how are they ready even to die for one another!**” (*Apologetica* 39.7)

- This type of sacrificial love exemplifies a level of intimacy that is only possible for a born-again believer.
- Once again, the Trinity forms the foundation for such intimacy:

“...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You.”

This mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity (known, theologically, as *perichoresis*, gives us a further glimpse into the nature of the Godhead: perfect consistency and purpose among the Three Persons. So should we be this way as believers.

- **A genuine JOY that is not a function of our circumstances**

- ✳ In light of the ‘glory’ that we are to share with Christ, we called to exhibit a genuine joy, Christ’s joy, that the world will not understand.
- ✳ Verse 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.
- ✳ The reason that this joy is so different from what the world understands is because **it is not a function of our circumstances**; rather, it is a function of **our obedience to the will of God**.

“It [true biblical unity] is **not** achieved by hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator, but by common adherence to the apostolic gospel, by love that is joyfully self-sacrificing, by undaunted commitment to the shared goals of the mission with which Jesus’ followers have been charged, by self-conscious dependence on God himself for life and fruitfulness.”

D.A. Carson

- **Fundamentally different from ‘wordly’ unity, and therefore RECOGNIZABLE to the world.**

- ✳ Because every Christian is chosen *out of the world* the entire communion of saints is a body that is not *of the world*. Furthermore, the nature of the unity that binds all true believers is a common salvation and knowledge of God – who is not *of the world*. Therefore, **the nature of true Christian unity must be fundamentally different from the world.**
- ✳ This is the point at which we fail the most in what Christ has commanded us to be – holy, different.
- ✳ It is as though the Western Church today attempts to be enough like the world to attract it, but “not compromise on the essentials.” Yet, this is most certainly an unbiblical approach based upon pragmatic principles of ‘what works’ (our justification to do what *we* think is right).

Appeared recently in the *Katy Courier*  
***Bait-and-Switch Religion***, by David Klingler

...it appears that many American churches are allowing pragmatism, rather than the Bible, to dictate how church is done...The plan is simple: entice people to attend church and then spring the gospel on them... Since what sells in America is the American dream, many churches are advertising that status, financial success, happiness, and problem-free living are readily available to every person through Jesus. To the American ear, this sounds pretty good. The only problem is that this is not what Jesus is selling nor promising those who choose to follow Him! ...It is for this reason that many churches have resorted to employing "bait-and-switch" tactics to attract a crowd in an attempt to eventually turn them into disciples. The problem is that once the crowd is attracted, the "switch" part of the "bait-and-switch" tactic is never implemented.

- ✳ We have also convinced ourselves of a lie: "As Christians, we can do anything that the world attempts to do, but better." We have also convinced ourselves that it is this level of 'excellence' that the world will see and be attracted to.
- ✳ But, notice what Jesus does NOT say: "The world will notice how large your church is, and efficient you are, while still being Christians, and they will be impressed, and will embrace the Gospel because of it."
- ✳ So much of what we do (in programs and activities) is focusing on the WRONG thing – size. In fact, what we do to attract people, more often than not, destroys the very thing we are to demonstrate that is unique to Christianity – **true biblical unity**.
- ✳ Our question, when planning activities, etc. should not be (primarily), "How many people does this bring in," but, "How does this promote unity among our people." **This is what the world will see as fundamentally different!**
- ✳ So many of the 'latest and greatest' church growth techniques could NEVER be implemented in a church our size – and this should concern us.
- ✳ However, the biblical approach takes no money and no human creativity or intuition – simply obedience to God and His Word.

### III. The Result of Christian Unity

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:9-12

- **Recognize the Unity**

- ✧ Verses 21 and 23 state, "...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...**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."
- ✧ It, therefore, must be acknowledged that, for the world to 'believe that You sent Me,' the 'world' must recognize the distinction between themselves and the people of God (who were chosen *out of* the world).

- **Hate the Believers [who are unified]**

- ✧ Verse 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."
  - "...Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in **the thing in which they slander you as evildoers...**"  
1 Peter 2:12

- **Believe because of it**

- ✧ This is the **great paradox** – As with the proclamation of the Gospel, the very thing that the world hates is also the instrument that God promises to use to save His people.
- ✧ "...Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, **they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God** in the day of visitation. "  
1 Peter 2:12
- ✧ When we try to become like the world in order to win the world, we forfeit the very means by which God has ordained to win the world – our distinction.

**Let us never forget that Jesus changed the world with only twelve [12] ordinary men. However, these men who: (1) were chosen out of the world, (2) sanctified by His Spirit and His Word, (3) were unified through their common commitment to knowing God, and (4) joyfully obeyed the will of God, not only in their lives, but in their deaths.** These were men like those written of in Hebrews 11: "They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy)...And all these, having gained approval through their faith..."