



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ♦ DEO ♦ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, Part 3

The Unity of the Body of Christ

John 17

July 9, 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?**
- ⇒ Many will recall Rodney King’s famous question, in 1992, “Can we all just get along?” The answer to this question is, of course, ‘No...not apart from the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.’

- ⇒ 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 originate ‘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

I. The Basis of Christian Unity

⇒ **The Will of the Father**

- Verse 2: “even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to *all whom You have given Him*, He may give eternal life.”
- Also, Verse 6 (“the men whom You gave Me...they were Yours...You gave them to Me...”); Verse 9 (“those whom You have given Me...they are Yours”); Verse 24 (“...they also, whom You have given Me...”).

⇒ **The Work of the Son, Jesus Christ: *What Christ has done***

- Verse 4: “having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do...”
- Verse 1: “Father, *the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.*”

⇒ Who Christ is

- Verse 2: “even as *You gave Him [the Son] authority over all flesh...*”
- Verse 5: “Father, *glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*”
- Verse 10: “and *all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine*; and I have been glorified in them.”

⇒ **The Sanctification of the Disciples [and all believers] (vv. 14-19)**

☆ It is difficult to overemphasize the sanctification, initially, of the disciples by the revelation of Christ Jesus. They had to first be chosen out of the world, sanctified for the mission of the spreading of the Gospel, so that they would form the foundation of the temple in the Lord, in order that we would believe through their word. Therefore, the sanctification of the disciples is, in part, the basis of the unity of believers today.

○ Read **Ephesians 2:19-22**

☆ The process of sanctification is nothing less than God's work in His people by which He makes them 'holy.' It is this process of being made 'holy' that the disciples, and all future believers, more closely resemble Christ in their character.

○ **Leviticus 11:44-45**: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy."

○ Read also **1 Peter 1:16** and **1 Peter 2:9**

○ **Verse 14**

✳ Jesus makes it clear that He gave His disciples 'His word' – that is, the full revelation of God.

✳ Furthermore, He states the truth that 'the world has hated them' – the reason is also stated – 'because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.'

• Jesus has stated earlier (15:18) that the world hated Him before it hated the disciples. The context of this Verse was that since Christ lives in the disciples, and the world hates Christ, that the world will hate the disciples because of who lives in them (Christ).

• Here, in Verse 14, Jesus is stating that since the disciples are no longer 'of the world' (yet, they remain 'in the world'), the world will hate them. This is because the flesh loves that which is like itself – hating that which is most different, that is Christ and all things of God.

- **Verse 15**
 - * Notice, in Verse 15, Jesus does **NOT** pray that the disciples would be taken out of the world (that is die), but rather, that they be protected from the evil one, the devil.
 - * This, too, is significant, as it is through the preaching of the first disciples that the Gospel spread to the ends of the earth, the canon of Scripture was completed, and we believed.

- **Verses 17-19:** “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”
 - * Jesus explicitly asks the Father to sanctify, specifically, His disciples, through the revelation of the word – which is truth.
 - * Furthermore, we see that the sanctification and sending of Jesus on His mission of redemption from the Father forms **the basis for the disciples’ sending**.
 - * NOTE: This same pattern certainly holds true today for contemporary believers:

It is only when we are sanctified, chosen out of the world, that we can experience true, biblical unity.

⇒ **Eternal Life – KNOWLEDGE of God**

- ☆ There are two aspects to this truth:
 - (1) Biblical unity is available only in the context of those who have eternal life; and
 - (2) The unifying basis is a common love of the knowledge of God – the very essence of eternal life.

- With respect to the **first truth**, we must understand that, apart from the salvific work of God, there can be no true, biblical unity.

- As a local body, we must model such unity; however, we cannot do this if we do not bear the characteristic of a regenerate body.

↗ In an article, entitled, 'Southern Baptists, an Unregenerate Denomination,' Jim Eliff (<http://ccwonline.org/sbc.html>) wrote,

Although the Southern Baptists claim 16,287,494 members, on average only 6,024,289 people (guests and non-member children included), a number equal to only 37% of the membership number, show up for their church's primary worship meeting (usually Sunday morning).

...Attendance *alone* does not guarantee that anyone is an authentic believer, but 'forsaking the assembling,' is a serious sign of the unregenerate heart.

...these numbers suggest that most of those who do not attend (or who only come when it is convenient), are more interested in themselves than God...The atmosphere that most pleases them is that of the world and not God. They can stand as much of God as makes them feel better about themselves, and they find a certain carnal security in 'belonging' to a local church.

↗ And all this in a denomination who claims that one of our primary historical distinctive is a regenerate body.

↗ This year, at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, Tom Ascol, Director of Founders Ministries, presented a resolution (<http://www.founders.org/blog/2006/06/resolution-on-integrity-in-church.html>) that read, in part, as follows:

...Whereas in 2004 the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Church Profiles indicated that there are 16,267,494 members in Southern Baptist churches; and

Whereas well over one half of those members never attend or participate meaningfully in the life of any local Southern Baptist church and are thus no different than non-members; and

Whereas the ideal of a regenerate church membership has long been and remains a cherished Baptist principle; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina, June 13-14, 2006, urge Southern Baptists to repent of our failure to maintain responsible church membership...

...RESOLVED that we commit to pray for our churches as they seek to honor the Lord Jesus Christ through reestablishing integrity to church membership and to the reporting of statistics in the Annual Church Profile.

↪ This resolution was rejected by the Resolutions Committee because of the following reason (quoting from the Chairman of the Resolutions Committee):

“...we understand and we are concerned about these things. However, we are also concerned about the accuracy of the claims because what we receive through the statistics are just those things that are reported by the local churches. And so we would have to challenge what they send us.

And we certainly do not want to throw away from our membership rolls the names of the non-attenders because we would be throwing away a very valuable prospect list for reclamation in evangelism. Now in Sunday School we don't cull the rolls as long as those people live in our area so that we can continue to pray for them and visit them and secure them in Bible study.”

↪ The Southern Baptists of Texas, *Texan* Publication paraphrased the outgoing President of the Southern Baptist Convention as stating, “The SBC's unparalleled strength is its size...”

↪ The question I ask is, ‘Should this not concern us?’

↪ Do we really wonder why there is such strife an division in our churches when, by some estimates (obviously no one can truly know who is saved and who is not) less than half of our members are even regenerate believers?

- With respect to the **second truth**, we must understand that, apart from the salvific work of God, there can be no true, biblical unity.
 - Let us understand this truth: **SOUND DOCTRINE WILL DIVIDE. However, it will unite those with a common passion to know and love the one true God.**
 - Verse 2: ‘even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.’

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Knowing God is not the means to an end. Knowing God is the end.

In other words, we do not seek to know God in order to be better parents, spouses, businessmen, etc. We seek to know God because this is our heart's greatest desire.

This is why we affirm the Westminster Catechism, which states, ‘The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.’

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It is often said in churches, “Well, that is just theology, and it is not necessarily practical...”

Too many churches in America today are united, not on knowing God, but on knowing God in order that . . .

These churches are NOT united in the context of John 17.

⇒ **The Nature of the triune God – The TRINITY**

✳ **The Glory of the Son and His followers** (v. 22)

- Recall, the ‘glory’ of the Son is nothing less than the exaltation of Jesus Christ through His ‘lifting up’ on the Cross of Calvary at the point of His crucifixion

✳ **The mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Godhead** (vv. 21, 23)

✳ **Sacrificial Love** (v. 26)

- The sacrificial love of the Son for those given to Him by the Father gives us the perfect example and basis for Christian unity in the Church today.
- “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”
John 15:13