

Christ's Prayer for Unification (part II)

John 17:20-26

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Introduction: In John 17, Christ's High Priestly Prayer, we have examined Christ's prayer for the glorification of the Savior (:1-5) & for His prayer for the sanctification of the sent ones (His disciples in verses 6-19). We come again tonight to the unification of the saints (:20-26). "The concluding section of the prayer is of the greatest interest for in it Jesus prays for all believers. It is thus a prayer for us as for those of previous generations. The dominant concern in the section is for unity & for the divine glory" (Leon Morris). Last week we considered the story behind the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers." Is this song doctrinally correct when it says: "...We are not divided, all one body we, one in hope & doctrine, one in charity"? Ask yourself another question: "Could Jesus Christ have prayed a prayer that God would not or could not answer? If so, then either Jesus asked for something contrary to the Father's will (impossible), or else all of Christ's own promises that our prayers will be answered are a hollow farce (unthinkable). What, then, do we make of Christ's express desire for the unity, or the oneness, of His people?" (Talbert). Last week we saw the context, the content, & the concept of Biblical unity. Tonight we will look at the **consequences** of Biblical unity & then at the **cautions** concerning Biblical unity, with an emphasis upon verses 24-26.

I. The **context** of Biblical unity (John 17:11 & cf.:6, 9, 14-19)

- A. Those given to Christ (:6) > His apostles
- B. Those who will believe in Christ (:20) > genuine believers (review: 6-19)

II. The **content** of Biblical unity (:15-21)

- A. Belief in Biblical truth (the Word of God) > acknowledgment of truth
- B. Loyalty to Biblical truth > adherence to truth

Contrast: Ecumenism says: "Doctrine divides; love unites." But Gillies points out in his book, Unity in the Dark, "The price of ecumenical success is the surrender of the authority & sufficiency of Holy Scripture." [cf. Acts 2:42 > doctrine before fellowship & see Eph. 4:4-6]

III. The **concept** of Biblical unity (:11, 21, and 22)

A. The explanation of such unity (:11, 21, and 22 – "as we are one")

- 1. What it is not:
 - a. It is not physical, external, structural, or organizational oneness.
 - b. It is not external uniformity or organizational unification.
- 2. What it is:
 - a. It is spiritual & internal, illustrated by the "oneness" of the Father & Son.
 - b. It is identified by their "oneness" in outlook, values, goals, & destiny.

Application: "Biblical oneness is an organic unity – an internal, spiritual unity of identity, outlook, values, goals, & destiny. It spans denominational divisions, external diversities, ideological differences & even honest theological disagreement to unite as brothers & sisters in one Body every genuinely regenerated child of God" (Talbert).

B. The expression of such unity (:11, 22)

- 1. Expressed by the *preservation* in one Body (:11).
- 2. Expressed by the *manifestation* of one God (:22).

Application: "How then should we live?" – I Pet. 1:16-17; I Cor. 6:19-20; Mt. 5:16. What are we "telling" the world about God from our lives? Our testimony in public? Are we sending a consistent message?]

IV. The consequences of Biblical unity (:21, 23, & 24-26)

A. That the world might believe that the Father sent the Son (:21).

1. The purpose of Christ's coming > I John 4:14
2. The picture of Christ's coming > John 13:34-35

Summary: Those evidencing & expressing God's love. "The lost world cannot see God, but they can see Christians; & what they see in us is what they will believe about God. If they see love & unity, they will believe that God is love. If they see hatred & division, they will reject the message of the Gospel" (Wiersbe).

B. That the world might know that the Father loves His children (:23).

1. Those who have responded to the Gospel message > John 1:12; 3:16; Romans 5:8
2. Those who have entered into the family of God > Galatians 3:26; II Cor. 6:17-18; John 14:21

Summary: Those experiencing God's blessings (in days of prosperity & adversity). Our response? (1) The **fellowship** of heaven > the presence of Christ (:24a): (2) The **focus** of heaven > the glory of Christ (:24b); & (2) The **foretaste** of heaven > the Bride of Christ (:25-26).

V. The cautions concerning Biblical unity

A. John 17 does not mean we should abandon Biblical separation:

1. This is rather a foundational oneness of spirit existing between true Christians.
2. This is reason to be committed to purity of life & doctrine.

B. John 17 does not mean we should not expose error in doctrine or practice:

1. We are to expose unbelief (II Tim. 3:1-8; II John; Jude) & heresy (divisiveness of spirit – I Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:9-11; III John).
2. We are to exhort a believer involved in error (II Thess. 3:6-15), reminded that he is a brother.

C. John 17 does not mean we should blur doctrinal distinctions or surrender heart-held convictions:

1. So long as our doctrines & convictions are genuine & Biblically based.
2. So that our consciences are submitted to the Word of God (not traditions of men).

Summary: John 17 is not a call for believers to be a unity, but rather to acknowledge the truth that there is a spirit of oneness in the Body of Christ. Note > Truth & love must go together (Eph. 4:15). "It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. The mind grows by taking in truth, but the heart grows by giving out in love. Knowledge alone can lead to pride (I Cor. 8:1), & love alone can lead to wrong decisions (Phil. 1:9-10). Christian love must not be blind" (Wiersbe).

Conclusion: D. Martin Lloyd Jones (a British pastor of renown) preached in response to those in the British Isles who wanted to push ecumenism. Using the same texts the liberals put forth for ecumenical unity (John 17 & Ephesians 4), Jones stated, "Unity is not something which exists, or of which you can speak, in & of itself. It is always the consequence of our belief & acceptance of this great & glorious doctrine of God who has provided in His Son the way of salvation, & who mediates it to us through the operation of the Holy Spirit. That is the basis & the nature of Christian unity." Christ's prayer is not for unification in the sense used by ecumenists. There is not a call for organizational unity or the end of denominations (the real goal of ecumenism). It is a reminder to those genuinely in Christ to acknowledge our unity & act like it. One of the practical evidences of such unity will be a willingness to receive criticism offered by those who are speaking the truth in love. True spiritual maturity causes one to admit his shortcomings & to profit even from criticism (cf. Proverbs 9:8-10). Has the prayer of Christ been answered? "The Father always answers His Son's prayers, so we know that believers who die do go to heaven to behold the glory of God" (Wiersbe). Might we demonstrate by our lives & by our lips the doctrinal correctness of Baring-Gould's hymn, "... We are not divided, all one body we, One in hope & doctrine, one in charity." What are we "telling" the world about God from our lives?