

## Jesus Prays for the Church, Part 2 John 17.20—26

### *Pastoral Prayer*

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### *Introduction*

Please turn in your Bibles to John 17 (p. \_\_\_\_). Final section of Christ's prayer for those who would believe—for us! Five elements that describe what Christ prayed for. Two last week, the other three today.

An amazing prayer. Reasons: (a) his anticipation that these fledgling disciples would carry out their mission, (b) his anticipation that people yet unborn would believe in One they'd never see, (c) the content of his prayer itself. Perhaps this is most amazing. X could have prayed for many things: fulfillment of the two great commands, propagation of the gospel, preserving grace. But the focus of his prayer is on our *oneness*. Not that these other matters are unimportant to X. (In fact, as you'll see, these others figure prominently in the prayer.) But in this last prayer before his crucifixion, he prays that they would be one.

Why? **FCF**. The church, the body of Christ, is composed of sinner-saints who alternately create unity where none exists or fracture unity that God created. **Theme**. X brings a God-like unity to a wildly diverse group of people so that the world will see his glory. IOW, the oneness for which he prays has implications for our love, our evangelism, and our perseverance. And so he prays, and so we listen.

### *Review*

1. The oneness Christ prayed for is **exemplified by the Trinity**.
  - The Triune God is a loving communion of three equal persons who work with perfect oneness of purpose and action within a functional subordination.

- So we are a communion of distinguishable people who are called to a oneness of purpose and action within a functional subordination.

2. The oneness Christ prayed for is **fulfilled in the church**.
  - Organic, not institutional
  - God-wrought, not human-created
  - Rooted in the personal and propositional revelation of the glory of God in Christ
  - Present, not future

### *Body*

3. The oneness Christ prayed for is **demonstrated by our love**.
  - 3.1 Believers are recipients of divine love (ἡγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἡγάπησας, 23)
    - A remarkable statement of the extent of God's love for the people of Christ! We are loved with the same love from the Father as Jesus himself is!
    - How is that love demonstrated? Ultimately in the **gospel**: Creator, fall (unable to keep God's law and so worthy of judgment), Christ's perfect life (to fulfill God's law), Christ's vicarious death (to satisfy God's wrath). All who turn from their sin and trust in Jesus alone will be delivered from the wrath of God. **App (g)**.
    - **App (d)**. If you are one who acknowledges the fullness of your sin (*even our righteousness*, Is 64.6) and trusting Jesus alone to rescue you, these words remind you again of your union with Christ.
    - **App (p)**. Consequently this is strong grounds for the assurance of your salvation. He will stop loving his own when he stops loving Jesus. Oh believer, rest in the sureness of God's unfailing love for you!

- 3.2 Believers are endowed with divine love (ἡ ἀγάπη ἣν ἠγάπησάς με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἡ, 26)
- Not merely a restatement that we are objects of God’s love, but that the love of God dwells in us.
  - This phrase “may mean ‘amongst them’ (and displayed in their love for one another) or ‘within them’ (so that as individuals they become loving people). It is impossible to think of one without the other. The crucial point is that this text does not simply make these followers the objects of God’s love (as in v. 23), but promises that they will be so transformed, as God is continually made known to them, that God’s own love for his Son will become their love. The love with which they learn to love is nothing less than the love amongst the persons of the Godhead (cf. notes on 15:12–17)” (Carson).
  - **App (ct).** The gospel transforms the way we think of one another. God’s love for X is his love for us is his love *in* us that we express toward one another.
    - *Outside our church.* This is why our posture is one of working with and assuming the best in others. **III** of inconveniencing ourselves for other churches. We put ourselves in their shoes and do what we can to serve, even as Christ put himself in our shoes and served us.
    - *Within congregational life.*
      - “The oneness for which Christ makes request is more than an ethical unity. It is a oneness so intimate, so vital, so personal that it is patterned after, and based on, the relations which exist between the persons of the Holy Trinity: it is a oneness not only of faith, hope, and love but of life itself” (Hendriksen).
      - Such love involves taking time to get to know one another. “We tend to have permanently casual

relationships that never grow into real intimacy. There are things we know *about* each other, but they fool us into thinking that we know the human beings who live within the borders of those details. So we fail to pursue them with good questions. This sets the stage for all kinds of misunderstandings” (Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 163).

- Sharing life with one another, making others’ joys our own, others’ sorrows our own. **III** of Claudia’s texts to Gloria every day between her mother’s passing and funeral. Thus the need for a simple tool like a membership directory.

4. The oneness Christ prayed for is **observed by the world.**

4.1 Results that Christ expected this oneness to produce

- Faith: ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας (21)
- Revelation: ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας (23)
- Attraction: ἵνα γινώσκῃ ὁ κόσμος . . . ἠγάπησας αὐτοὺς καθὼς ἐμὲ ἠγάπησας (23)
  - “Although the unity envisaged in this chapter is not institutional, this purpose clause at the end of v. 21 shows beyond possibility of doubt that the unity is meant to be observable” (Carson).

4.2 Reason

- The oneness that the Spirit gives us in the church is long sought but never replicated by the world.
- The recognition of ontological equality leads some to create unity based on an egalitarian sameness (e.g., the 99%). But this fails because, if everyone’s ideas matter equally, there can be no oneness of purpose and mission.

- Other recognize the need for functional subordination, that some are called to lead the others. This allows for oneness of purpose and mission, but ultimately tramples on those who don't agree with those leaders.
- But the Spirit creates in the church the oneness that can't be replicated elsewhere, because it's based on the ultimate reality of the Triune God: a loving communion of three equal persons who work with perfect oneness of purpose and action within a functional subordination.
- Consequently our oneness becomes a visual means of evangelism, a display to the world of what God can do when he loves us with the love of Christ and transforms us into a people who love one another with that same love.
- **App (ct)**. We often think of evangelism in terms of verbal proclamation, and well we should! But here we learn that evangelism is not only verbal, but also visual; we share the gospel in word and deed. How we live—esp. how we love one another in the body of Christ—substantiates our testimony. **Ill** of a lady coming to X at Grace Church Alexandria through the love of the people over months. Your love for those around you displays the glory of the X who has loved you—and may win them to faith in him.

5. The oneness Christ prayed for is **perfected in eternity**.

5.1 Already united, awaiting perfection: ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι

εἰς ἕν (23)

- Here is another case where we're living between the already and the not yet, e.g., the Spirit as *down payment* (Eph 1.14). The work that the Spirit has done awaits consummation.
- **App (ct)**. This helps explain why we face so many thorny questions w.r.t. unity and separation. We are one awaiting perfect oneness.

- **Ill** of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15.36—41 – *there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other*). Who was right? Both (cf. Acts 16ff. following Paul's story and 2Tim 4.11 [Mark's profitability]).
- **App (ct)**. Varying types of gospel partnership require varying types of gospel agreement. We're going to have disagreements with other Christians/churches. Sometimes the best thing we can do is distance ourselves from one another, not writing the other off as a heretic (**ill** of Baptists on a bridge!), but out of love for one another and sincere desire to protect our not-yet-perfected oneness for the sake of the gospel. **Ill** of [John Wesley after Whitefield's death](#): "Do not misunderstand me, madam; George Whitefield was so bright a star in the firmament of God's glory, and will stand so near the throne, that one like me, who am less than the least, will never catch a glimpse of him."

5.2 Glory witnessed, awaiting glory: ἵνα θεωρῶσιν τὴν δόξαν τὴν ἐμὴν ἣν δέδωκάς μοι (24)

- We have seen his glory, the glory of the Unique Son, full of grace and truth (1.14). But a fuller revelation is coming, a day when we will be with our Savior see our him as he is!

Father of Jesus, Love Divine, what rapture will it be,  
prostrate before Thy throne to lie and gaze and gaze on Thee!

Preparation for communion: (a) reminder that this is a fellowship of love, and we are all undeserving; (b) by this action, we *proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*, when all will be as it ought.

*Benediction*

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with you all. –2Cor 13.14