

November 1, 2015  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: John  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as we prepare to study John 17:20-26.

1. What causes disunity among Christians?
2. If no one will ever be perfect in this life, how can we attain unity?
3. What is the glory that Jesus Christ has given to us?
4. Why is unity among believers so important?

**THAT WE MIGHT BE ONE**  
**John 17:20-26**

I remember a church down the road from where I grew up as a boy. It was called “The United Church.” The building and organization had been around for many years. The problem was that everyone in the little town knew that the people were not united. Like most churches, this one had experienced plenty of disagreements and sometimes an outright fight. That church was like one I became acquainted with many years ago while I was planting a church in another town. I met a fellow who told me he attended Unity Baptist Church. I confessed that I was not familiar with that church so he proceeded to give me the details of how four other churches in town had come out of Unity Baptist by way of splits.

Something isn’t working in these cases. Has it ever? No one who knows anything about the visible church in the world would ever claim that we are a smashing success at unity. But maybe we are

more unified than it first appears. Let’s consider another example of unity. About 240 years ago, 13 independent states or commonwealths got together to form a “union.” These independent states worked together by sending representatives to Washington D.C. on a regular basis to talk about the things they had in common. The fact is there was quite a difference between many of the states, especially as more states were formed over the years and became part of the union. That difference was most marked between the industrial states in the north and the agrarian states in the south.

Our history indicates that nearly all presidents and all writings in those early years referred to this conglomeration of states as the union. For the most part, everyone was tolerant of everyone else. But the day came when someone concluded that a union of independent states was not sufficient. Movers and shakers decided there needed to be a “nation” and that all the states in that nation would be the same as much as possible. That is when we began to strive to be the uniform states of America where differences are frowned on.

Unity is the bliss of different kinds of people working together in harmony. Uniformity is the demand that everyone be exactly alike. Unity is from God. Uniformity is Satan’s plan. Unity tolerates differences. Uniformity tolerates only what fits its ultimate goal. Unity finds ways to work together; uniformity cannot or will not work with those who are different.

When it comes to the Church, unity is clearly God’s plan. He has placed different parts with different functions in the same body to work together. God uses all manner of personalities to accomplish His work. God draws together people from very diverse backgrounds to work together patiently and with toleration. The key in making this work is what some people will claim is a demand for uniformity. God’s holy character is the boundary for our unity, not a demand for uniformity. Anyone who chooses to live contrary to what God has revealed to us about Himself will not contribute to the unity of the Church. More directly, people who decide to live in known and obvious sin shouldn’t complain if the unity of the Church is not maintained.

Jesus, God the Son, God who came in the form of man, mapped out this plan in His prayer. He prayed for the unity of His followers. He prayed that we will work together to help the world see God’s

glory. He prayed that we will work according to the word He brought from heaven. When those elements are in order, there will be unity and God will receive glory. Altar those elements, and God will not be glorified and unity goes out the window. Sadly that is the more accurate description of the universal church today.

### **Our Lord Prayed for Unity in Him (vv.20-23).**

Unity reveals God's character so the world will believe (vv.20-21). To that end, Christ prayed for us who believe in Him. *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word"* (v.20). One of the most encouraging statements in this phrase reveals that Jesus prayed for people who would live in the future. In particular, that is us who are born again. In fact, this sets the rule that the requests of this prayer apply to people who believe Christ in every age since He bought redemption. To us also is the promise that Christ has revealed the character of God to each one God has given Him (v.6). We too now know God's plan for redemption (v.7). We, along with the eleven disciples, know because Jesus gave us God's Word (v.8). We are kept in God's name while we live in the world (v.11). We are not of the world (v.14). We are being sanctified by God's truth – the Bible (v.17).

We believe in Jesus because of what we learned. What we learned was the apostles' word. God the Holy Spirit carried them along to write the Scripture. All of the New Testament books give us evidence and reason to believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be. Add to that all the Old Testament writings which were also the product of Holy Spirit inspiration and we have all the evidence, proof, and arguments necessary to trust Christ. So Paul reminded Timothy, *how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).*

This then is a prayer for the entire Church universal—everyone who is born again through faith during the time after Christ's resurrection and His return in glory at the end of the age. For this fractured conglomeration, Christ prayed that we will all be one. *"That they may all be one, just 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 have sent me"* (v.21). Can we even begin to grasp this concept of unity? All born again people should be in union just like the Father is in union with the Son and the Son in union with the Father. How does that work? Has there ever been such a point in history? From the outset of the Church, we find Christians arguing about which preacher they follow (1 Cor. 1:10-17). In the earliest churches, we see the "haves" shunning the "have nots" (1 Cor. 11). There were two of the key leaders in conflict as Paul faced down Peter publicly for acting hypocritically (Gal. 3:11-14). Throughout history there have been serious disagreements, breaches of fellowship, and separation.

Okay, it is not a pretty picture that will never illustrate the unity for which Jesus prayed. But stop to consider that what Jesus just expressed in this statement is a review of the vine and branches picture in chapter fifteen. God the Father and God the Son are one, coequal in authority and character. God then is the vine. We people are the branches attached to the vine. The better we understand that attachment, the more we draw on the resource of the vine, the better we will produce fruit that reveals the nature of the vine (God).

Some branches are not connected at all and are cut off to be thrown into the fire. Disconnected branches talk about Christianity, those who claim to be Christians – but are not. They can never experience unity with Christians who depend wholly on God and trust Him completely. The less a professing Christian is attached to God in fellowship, the less he or she will be unified with the more tightly attached branches.

The key lesson in the vine and branch picture is that branches will produce fruit that manifests God's character on differing levels according to how deeply the branch is attached to the vine. True branches understand greater and lesser levels of fruit production. True branches patiently help and encourage the weaker branches to produce more fruit that looks like God. True branches honor the other branches that produce much fruit and desire to be like them. That is what unity looks like.

Is it really necessary? Jesus gave us a good reason for unity in this prayer. We need to demonstrate unity so that the world may believe that Jesus is God. When we produce Christ-like fruit, the world is forced to consider the relationship between God the Father,

God the Son, and the followers of God. Therefore, a weak attachment to the vine, a shallow fellowship with Christ, can actually be a distraction so that sinners will not see a reason to believe Jesus.

When our son Matthew was preparing to graduate from Highschool, we attended a day of orientation at West Point where Matt was considering attending. The staff was careful to pair up potential students with current students of like character. Therefore, Matt was not surprised to be matched up with a Christian young man from Charleston, SC. What did surprise Matt was when he mentioned another Cadet's name who we knew and told his host that this Cadet was also a Christian. Matt's host reacted with surprise. "I had no idea he was a believer," the young man responded. That make-believe "branch" was not attached to the vine in spite of what he claimed. And he did much damage by claiming to be a believer but acting just like unbelievers of the world.

God's plan is that unity will reveal God's glory so that the world will know (vv.22-23). We who are born again have no excuse for not revealing God's glory because Christ gave us His glory. He prayed, "*The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one*" (v.22). What is the glory of God that Jesus has shared with us? Obviously, He has not given us even a sliver of that glory He allowed Peter, James, and John to glimpse on the mount. Nor has He given us the majesty He lived in continually in eternity and before He laid it aside to come to earth. Also, He has not showered us with the splendor He returned to when He ascended after He won our redemption.

Probably that glory of God is manifested in a couple of gifts Jesus gave to us. He gave us the glory of His Word. In the Bible we are always confronted with the astonishing majesty of God the Father and God the Son. God's glory is the essence of His person and character and the Bible describes it in many details. Though even with this great gift we still see through a glass darkly. Second, Jesus gave us the glory of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the helper like Jesus. Most people are not impressed with the glory He conveys because they always quench His power and grieve Him.

Therefore, God the Holy Spirit teaching us through the Scripture reminds us that we are to do everything in life with an eye on His glory. As Paul wrote, *So, whether you eat or drink, or*

*whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).* This thought teaches that there is a proper assessment of God. That assessment is defined throughout the Bible. As we read and study the Bible, the Holy Spirit prompts us to a right view of our magnificent God. It is very important that we keep that view un-muddied by the world and desires of the flesh.

Why keep the glory clear? What does Jesus intend for us to do with that glory? Jesus gave us His glory "*that they may be one even as we are one.*" The work of the Bible and the Holy Spirit in our lives helps us get along. This two-fold glory shapes us, matures us, and tempers us so that more and more we reflect the glory of our Creator who is manifested in the Bible and God the Holy Spirit. Therefore, where there is no unity, it must mean that someone is not being shaped by the glory of the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

Again we wonder why that unity is so important. It is important because Christ's glory revealed in us gives knowledge to the world. "*I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me*" (v.23). If we are people given to Christ in salvation, Christ is in us just like God the Father is in God the Son. This speaks of the most intimate unity. It is not just that Christ is in us, but that He and we are becoming just alike.

That seems like a pretty deep theological concept. By what means does this unity with Christ come about? Christ is in us through the person of the Holy Spirit. Christ is in us through the presence of His Word. That is what the instruction to the church in Colossae taught. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Colossians 3:16).* Obviously, when Christ is dwelling in us **richly** through the Bible, we enjoy the unity of corporate worship with other people in whom Christ is dwelling richly.

Honestly, I struggle with the modern idea of worship. I pulled up a couple of examples of contemporary worship on the internet just to make sure I was still of the same opinion. What I saw in the lights, the noise, the rock star atmosphere was not at all what I find as the manifestation of Christ in the Bible. Not only did my spirit not sense a deep unity, but I'm sure God the Holy Spirit was offended. These

were not examples of the glory of God but were plain demonstrations of the glory of the flesh which is the world. So! Let's be unified with the world. Isn't that who we are trying to reach?

That idea is contrary to God's plan because the purpose of unity in the glory of God is to show the world that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are not one with them! True unity is intended to set a clear standard "so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." The testimony that flows out of the glory of God's Word and God the Holy Spirit is intended to speak volumes to the world. It is to reveal to the world that God is different. It is to reveal to the world that Jesus of Nazareth was God. That testimony shows that God loves us His followers. It reveals that God the Father loved God the Son and said of Him "this is My beloved Son." And all of that is to help the world understand the awful price that was paid so they can be forgiven of the sin of their fleshly desires and abandon it.

#### **Our Lord Prayed for His Peoples' Presence With Him (vv.24-26).**

He desires for His people to be with Him (v.24). More precisely, Christ desires for us to be in heaven. "*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am*" (v.24a). Jesus is now at home at the Father's right hand in heaven. Does it not go without saying that heaven is other worldly?

It is good for us to read and meditate on the Scripture's descriptions of heaven. Like Isaiah: *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:1-4).*

John's vision on the Isle of Patmos revealed a very similar picture of God's throne room in heaven. *At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an*

*emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight (Revelation 4:2-7).*

These pictures of God's glory make the smoke, lights, and thumping, screeching sounds of the rock star environment look cheap, phony, and stimulating to only the flesh. There will not be any fleshly stimulation in heaven.

But we are not in heaven yet. Jesus desires for us to be there. I desire to be there. But for now, Jesus left us in the world to accomplish God's purpose and show forth a right testimony about Him. That testimony of truth reflects God's glory which in turn condemns unbelievers. The testimony of a branch connected to the Vine is a reflection of God's glory which is evidence against the unbeliever. Unbelievers are not comfortable with that. Therefore, Jesus, knowing that we will have difficulty living in Satan's world, looks forward to us being with Him in heaven as much as we do.

Along with being with Him, Christ desires for us to observe His perfect glory. He wants us to be with Him "*to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world*" (v.24b). While we are impressed with our Savior's glory, we do not have a real clear picture of it yet. Our Savior's glory is as astonishing as the glory of the Father who loves Him and has always loved Him. Which truth teaches that God the Son has always been God the Son. It is not that God created the Son along with other created things. Nor did the second member of the Godhead become the Son when He came to earth. For eternity, He has been the beloved Son of God the Father.

We see this glory only dimly now even as we see more and more as we proceed toward the splendor of heaven. Paul stated the issue: *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is,*

*there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).*

Our Lord desires for us to be with Him and desires for us to see His glory. But all of that leads to one important principle. Christ desires for His people to love because of His presence (vv.25-26). The assurance is that we know who Christ is. *“O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me” (v.25).* That is an important contrast to the reality that the world does not know God. They talk about God, criticize people who love God, and ultimately reject God. They even claim to worship God as long as it doesn't interfere with their joy of getting drunk at Oktoberfest.

Conversely (very conversely), the Son knows the Father, Creator, Eternal Judge perfectly. In kindness and mercy God the Son has revealed His intimate knowledge of the Father. The world has no time or appreciation for such knowledge and rejected the Son. But we believe Jesus. We who are born again, chosen by God for salvation, brought by God to the Son, trust Him implicitly, trust Him alone for salvation. We know Him intimately like a branch attached to the Vine knows the vine. The world who talks about Christ, claims to worship Him when it is convenient, but in reality rejects Him, knows nothing of this kind of relationship.

If we really know Christ, we will be becoming more like Him. The better we know Christ, the better we will love like He loves. Jesus prayed, *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (v.26).* He revealed the Father's character to the disciples. He continues to reveal the Father's character to us. As a result, we should grasp the deep love of the Father for the Son. That love is manifested best in redemption, the shame and glory of the cross.

Because Jesus Christ is in us (in the Holy Spirit) that same kind of love He has ought to be in us. Why? Because Jesus gave us the teaching He heard from the Father in heaven. That teaching reveals the Father's character. The Father's love will be defined by His character. That kind of love cannot help but produce unity. It is bound

by God's holy character. Therefore its goal is Godliness (what is best). At the same time, it is kind, patient, long-suffering like God is. The result has to be unity with other people who love the same God, know the same God, practice the same truth from God. At the same time, it will be impossible to live in unity with the world who hates God, who hates Christ, who hates Christ's Word, and therefore hates us who love it and try to live it.