

3. Finally, Jesus broadened His intercession from the Eleven to the whole community of faith that would emerge from the apostolic witness (17:20-26). His Father had promised to make Abraham the father of a multitude of nations and Jesus was the “seed” in whom this promise was to be fulfilled. He would mediate Yahweh’s blessing to all the earth’s families, but through those who shared in His life by the Spirit. The apostles were to be the foundation of this work, but it would continue through those joined to the Messiah through their testimony. Stone by stone, Jesus was going to build His Father’s sanctuary upon the foundation of His apostles and with Himself as the living cornerstone.

Jesus didn’t mention this sanctuary imagery in His prayer, but it was undoubtedly a premise of His petitions (and John’s concern in recording them). John’s account shows that Jesus realized His Father was restoring His sanctuary in Him (2:13-21, 4:19-24). He was the true sanctuary as *Immanuel* (14:1-11; cf. 1:1, 14), but also the prophesied *cornerstone* (cf. Psalm 118:22-23; Isaiah 28:16 and Zechariah 10:1-4 with Matthew 21:33-42), such that Yahweh’s dwelling place was to have its fullness in all of the living stones added to Him (1 Peter 2:4-10; cf. Ephesians 2:11-22). Israel’s prophets were agreed that the Lord was going to restore His sanctuary in connection with His Messiah and He’d be the focal point in bringing the world back to Himself. Yahweh was going to gather Israel and the nations to Mount Zion and His sanctuary by gathering them to the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4 with 11:1-13; also Isaiah 49:1-6, 53:1-55:5, 59:16-61:3; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-8; Haggai 2:1-10; Zechariah 2:1-3:10, 6:9-15; etc.).

Jesus and John both understood that the Father’s intention was not just to save individual human beings, but to make them His own dwelling place. He’d sent His Son to make an abode for men in His house (14:2-3), but He’d receive them into that “room” by making His own abode in them (14:16-23). *In His Son and by His Spirit, the Father was going to bring men into His sanctuary by making them His dwelling place.* The prophets had promised Yahweh’s return to a restored sanctuary; that promise was now “yes and amen” in Jesus. In Him Yahweh was “tabernacling” in the world; upon Him as the cornerstone Yahweh was building His sanctuary with men as living stones. But as with a physical dwelling, such “stones” must be shaped, fashioned and joined together into a cohesive whole if they are to form a solid and sound structure. In Peter’s words, they must be “built up” to form a “spiritual house” – a dwelling of and by the Spirit.

- a. This is the backdrop of Jesus’ burden and His core plea for *unity* among His disciples (17:11, 20-23). It is noteworthy that Jesus connected this petition with His plea for the disciples’ sanctity (vv. 17-19). He recognized that *holiness* (consecration) and *unity* imply one another and are mutually dependent.
  - Holiness is first a *state of being* and only then a manner of life. A person or thing is “holy” when God has set it apart to Himself to be solely His possession devoted to His worship and service. And because God sets human beings apart to Himself by joining them to His Son in the Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; Ephesians 2:19-22), their “holiness” necessarily connects them with all other consecrated persons. Union with Christ results in union with all who are joined to Him (1 Corinthians 12).

- So also unity is principally a state of being; it defines those in Christ as much as holiness does and for the same reason. Unity speaks to the truth that those who share in Christ's life become members of one another. Because the Messiah is one and His Spirit is one, so are those set apart in Him. A body consists of many members, but there is yet only one body united in its common share in the life and leading of the one Head.

Holiness and unity cannot exist apart from one another any more than breathing and a heartbeat. Participation in biological life implies and requires the latter; participation in the divine life in Christ implies and requires the former. But the state of *being alive* expresses itself in the *activity* of life. This is true with biological life and it is true with spiritual life: Holiness and unity define those who share in Jesus' life, but for that reason they are also the authentic expression of that life. Paul came to understand this and so made unity and holiness the centerpieces of his instruction and exhortations to the churches.

Holiness and unity imply one another; they are inseparable and mutually interpreting. This means that each can only be understood in terms of the other. With respect to unity, understanding it in terms of holiness shows it to be a *christological*, *spiritual* and *ontological* concept. That is, unity has to do with a person's *being* as He shares in the resurrected *Christ* by the renewing and indwelling *Spirit*. This is critically important, especially since most Christians conceive and pursue unity in natural terms. Christian unity is typically treated as *uniformity* – agreement with and conformity to certain ideas, doctrines, behaviors and ecclesiastical norms. Though there is the presumption of some sort of connection with Jesus, the focus is on doctrinal and practical conformity.

Jesus understood unity in an entirely different way: *Unity among His disciples means their "oneness" with one another; oneness that reflects and expresses their oneness with Him and His oneness with His Father* (17:20-21a). Here again, the christological, spiritual and ontological nature of unity comes to the forefront. The unity Jesus prayed for is not agreement and conformity exercised by knowledgeable, disciplined and committed people, but the manifestation of the transcendent unity He was about to establish in Himself by His outpoured Spirit. Alienation and enmity were the fruit of the Fall and Jesus knew that He was about to overthrow the curse by reconciling all things to His Father (Colossians 1:19-20) toward the divine goal of "summing up" the whole creation in Himself (Ephesians 1:9-10). He'd come to unify God's fractured creation, thereby restoring the creational harmony of *shalom*. But *human* unity is at the center of this project and this was to be achieved by man becoming truly *man* – human beings partaking in Jesus' resurrected humanness by the Spirit taking them up into the life of God. Jesus knew this to be His mission and He pled with His Father in view of it. He wasn't interested in any sort of natural unity; He longed that all who'd become His disciples would live into and live out the truth of their discipleship – that they would know and demonstrate their oneness as those participating in the singular life and love which exist between the Father and Son.

- b. And Jesus sought this unity, not for its own sake, but for the sake of His disciples' witness to the truth. He was sending them as His Father had sent Him; He'd come to testify to the truth and now He was commissioning them to continue His mission. He was sending them into the world to testify to Him, but as those sharing in His life by His Spirit. Their witness was to be *His* witness through them, but this wouldn't be possible except as they manifested *Him*, and this involved manifesting the truth of His person and work – not just the fact of His life, death and resurrection, but what they accomplished and what they mean for the world. The Father had sent His Son to bring life out of death; His work pertained, not just to atonement and personal forgiveness, but creational renewal.

Thus witness to Jesus is witness to the new creation in Him, but this testimony depends upon His witnesses *demonstrating* new creation. Without the evidence of this renewal, how can people know and believe the “good news” that the Father sent the Son – that this man Jesus has accomplished God's design and inaugurated His new creation by His resurrection from the dead (17:21, 23)? Will they not rightly say, “all things continue as they have from the beginning”? And this is precisely what people observe when they look at the world around them. There is no evidence of any sort of renewal within the natural order; even the most pristine, untouched eco-system is tainted by conflict, suffering and death. There is only one part of the natural order that has experienced this work of new creation and that is the community of human beings who share in Christ's resurrection life. He is the substance and “first-fruits” of God's new creation, but it is tangibly present in the world in those in whom He has His “fullness” (Ephesians 1:18-23).

Jesus' plea for unity reflected the fact that His disciples are *themselves* the evidence for the message they take into the world. But their testimony depends not so much upon their individual witness as their *collective* one. In Jesus' words, the world would know and believe that the Father sent Him when His disciples manifested their *oneness*. The gospel of God's new creational kingdom in Jesus the Messiah is demonstrated as true by the way the believing community conducts its life together. There are two primary reasons that this is the case:

*First*, the disciples' oneness testifies to the *nature* of new creation. Jesus came to reconcile the world to God and this involves the true intimacy of sharing in God's life. Jesus' disciples are “in” the Son and Father as the Father and Son are “in” each other (14:20, 23). By His Spirit, Jesus is living His life in them (Colossians 3:1-4) and their mutual share in Him unites them to one another. For human beings, new creation means sharing in the life of the New Man; it means a new human community that is His body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:1-6).

*Secondly*, it testifies to the *effect* of new creation. God is love and those who share in His life are defined and characterized by that same love. In a world in which “love” is merely utility and reciprocity, a community of people marked by mutual devotion and submission in self-giving love affirms the testimony that Jesus has indeed inaugurated a new paradigm of humanness (13:35; cf. Acts 2:42-47).

- c. Jesus desired that His disciples would come to experience the oneness He shared with His Father and He noted that He'd given them His Father's *glory* toward this end (17:22). At first glance this statement is mystifying; how had Jesus given to His disciples – not just the Eleven present with Him, but all those who would later come to believe in Him – the glory His Father gave Him? Apart from the idea of Jesus giving His Father's glory to men, this community of disciples didn't even exist yet; how, then, could He have already given them this glory? The interpretive key is the fact that this statement draws on *sanctuary* imagery. For a Jew, any reference to God's glory called to mind His Shekinah presence in the sanctuary. This is the idea behind John's assertion in 1:14-18; Jesus, the incarnate Logos, embodied Israel's God and so was His manifest glory "tabernacling" among men (cf. 12:35-41; Isaiah 6). The Father had given the Son His glory by the incarnation and the Son manifested this glory by speaking the Father's words and doing His works; witnessing the Son was witnessing Yahweh Himself.

Jesus was the true sanctuary, but a sanctuary that was to have its fullness in all those joined to Him. As He embodied His Father, His disciples were going to embody Him in the world. In this way they, too, would embody the Father (17:21-23). This is the sense in which the Father's glory – the glory of Israel's God – was passing from the Son to His disciples and Jesus' use of the perfect tense for this endowment (as recorded by John) echoes the Hebraism known as the "prophetic perfect." This construct treats a future action as already accomplished to emphasize its certainty in God's purposes. Jesus' disciples didn't yet possess the Father's glory, but they *would* very soon and then they'd be fitted to bear that glory into the world. And manifesting His glory in His Son's disciples, the Father would cause the world to know that He loved them even as He loved His Son.

- d. In context, the Son's glory was the Father's glory in Him and Jesus yearned for His disciples to know and appropriate that glory. That involved them being with their Lord "where He is" (17:24), a reference, not to a place, but a *condition*. He'd already told the Eleven that He was going to return to take them to Himself (14:1-3) and He'd accomplish this reunion by His Spirit (14:18-23). His disciples would be "with Him where He is" because of being united to Him (cf. Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 3:1-3). And sharing in His life and mind, they would indeed behold His glory, even as it became theirs (ref. again v. 22; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:7-18).
- e. Jesus concluded His prayer with an affirmation of His absolute devotion to His Father and His purposes for the world (17:25-26). He'd come for the sake of that work and had faithfully executed it to that very hour. Now the time was at hand to complete it so that the Father's design of fruitfulness would be realized (cf. 12:23-24, 32, 15:1-8). Jesus had faithfully and truthfully disclosed His Father to men ("made known His name") through all that He was and said and did and that disclosure was going to continue. But now in a profoundly new way – not by His words and deeds in His bodily presence, but by joining His disciples to His Father by joining them to Himself. He was returning to make His abode with them, but in the Spirit who is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son (vv. 21-23; 14:23).