

Unify Them

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[0 : 00] to John chapter 17. John 17, and we're going to read verses 13 to 26.

We have the privilege of listening to Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, as he prays for his sheep. John 17, 13.

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth.

Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them, I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

[1 : 09] My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you.

May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.

I in them, and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity, to let the world know that you sent me, and have loved them, even as you have loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me, because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known, in order that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I myself may be in them.

[2 : 18] Let's pray. Our great God in heaven, we are privileged to be here. We're privileged to be in a country where we are free from persecution, where we can come freely and gather with your people without fear.

of being persecuted. Lord, most of all, we're privileged to have you here, as your word is read and preached.

You promise that you are here, and so we're thankful for that, and we ask that you would move among us in our hearts as we hear your word.

Lord, that you would guide us, that you would lead us as our great shepherd through the preaching of your word. We pray this for your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's hear the word.

How important is the unity of the churches of Jesus Christ? How much effort do you give to maintaining that unity in the body of Christ?

[3 : 29] Fathers, isn't it nice to come home after a hard day's work and to find the family quarreling and arguing and yelling at one another? You say, no, I'm ready to get back in my car and go back to work if I would come home to such an environment.

It's a wonderful thing to come home to a family marked by mutual love that finds joy in serving each other, that go out of their way to please the other, that work together as on the same team, that speak to one another in kind, respectful tones and that compete only in outdoing each other and putting the other above themselves.

You treasure the unity of your families, fathers, and Jesus treasures the unity of His family. And these prayers of Jesus, as we've seen, this prayer of Jesus in John 17, as we've been seeing, reveals the heart of Jesus.

What we pray for is what we treasure. And so far in His prayer, here in John 17, we've seen Jesus' heart for the glory of God the Father.

We've seen His heart for the good of His disciples in what He prays for them. And we've seen His heart for the success of His mission to this world, that as You have sent me, Father, so I'm sending them.

[4 : 53] And He prays for the success of that mission. So we're looking at His four petitions in this prayer for the good of His disciples. So far we've seen protect them, sanctify them.

And what we've seen is that behind these petitions for their good is also His concern for the gospel mission. In other words, the reason He prays for their protection is because He's leaving them in this world where the world hates them and in a world under the control of the evil one who also hates them.

And the reason Jesus is leaving them in a world that's such a dangerous place is that they might reach the world with His gospel and carry on that mission that He came to bring salvation to a world in sin.

And then He prays sanctify them. And the reason that we need this prayer for our sanctification is not only because we're left in an evil world and a world that tempts us and pulls us down and would cause us to sin, but also because it's only holy, sanctified, Christ-like people who will do this world good that can really carry out the mission that He's given us and bring glory to God before a watching world.

So we find that the mission, you see, is never far from the mind of our Savior in this prayer. And that's a challenge to me.

[6 : 33] How much is the Great Commission never far from what I am praying for? because that is our great reason for being here, reason for being left in a dangerous world that we might reach the world for Christ.

Now we're going to see the same concern for the world in the third petition tonight. The third petition, Jesus prays for His disciples. It's unify them. Make them one.

I've got five points. The first is its importance. its importance. To hear Jesus praying on the night of His arrest is to realize how important the unity and peace of His church is to Him and how grievous to Him are its divisions and infightings.

His prayer is unify them. We see it four times. Verse 11b. Protect them that they may be one as we are one.

Verse 21. That all of them may be one. Verse 22. That they may be one as we are one. And verse 23. That they may be brought to complete unity or perfected in unity.

[7 : 48] So He's just hours away from the hellish ordeal of the cross of having His Father separated from Him and His wrath poured out upon Him.

And yet, He's thinking of us and praying for us. And not once, but four times, He breathes out this holy desire to His Father for our unity.

This matter of the unity in His family is dear to the heart of our Lord Jesus. Indeed, that's one of the reasons He goes to the cross. He dies to make us holy.

He dies to sanctify us. He dies to unify us. And His prayer reveals then just how important it is to Him. If you were walking through your house and glanced into the living room tomorrow morning and saw the Lord Jesus down on His knees praying and you overheard Him pray four times for one matter in your life, could you ever think of that matter with indifference after that point?

Or would it not jar you and say, wow, if that is something so important to our Savior about us, surely, I need to prioritize the same.

[9 : 00] So, that's the application to this first point. Let us prioritize the importance of the unity that we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The second point is its pattern. Not only the importance of unity, but the pattern of unity. Now, whenever we're using a pattern, the aim of what we're making is to have it look as close as we can to the pattern that we're following.

So, what is the pattern of our unity? What is it that we're trying to match? Well, it's the very unity in the three persons of the Godhead.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Notice how Jesus prays in verses 22, 20 to 22. My prayer is not for them alone, the 12 alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me, you and I.

we have believed in him through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

[10:06] I've given them the glory you gave me that they may be one as we are one. So, there's the pattern for our unity. It's to be just as the Father and the Son are one.

And between them there is perfect unity of mind and heart, of will and desire. Consider this unity. Think of God the Father. What was He about? Well, He chose precisely which sinners that He would save from their deserved damnation. And He gave those chosen ones to His Son that He might do everything necessary for their salvation.

That He might give eternal life to all those that the Father had given Him. So, that was the Father's plan and will. Well, what about the Son? Well, He came and what did He come to do?

He didn't come to do His own thing. He didn't come to pursue a different plan. He tells us, I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me.

[11:18] And this is the will of Him who sent me that I should lose none of all that He has given me but raise them up at the last day. He lived and died for all those that the Father gave Him showing us that between the Father and the Son there is perfect unity of heart and mind, plan and purpose and mission.

And the same is true of the Holy Spirit. He sent from the Father and the Son to apply this salvation to all those chosen by the Father and all those redeemed by the Son.

That's who the Holy Spirit regenerates and gives new birth to. So there's no dissension. There's no arguing in the Trinity. There's no pursuing different goals.

You don't have the Father in election pursuing one plan to save a certain people and then the Son in redemption pursuing another plan living and dying to save all people and then the Holy Spirit in regeneration pursuing a whole different group of people to whom to give the new birth.

No, all three persons of the Godhead working together in perfect unity. And so when Jesus prays, Father, make them one just as we are one, we're looking at the pattern for our unity with each other.

[12:45] So our pattern is way over our heads, isn't it? If the Trinity is the pattern for us. This is more than we can pull off.

We're called to so live together in unity that we reflect the glorious unity of the Trinity. And that means that we cloud the divine glory.

We hide the divine glory when our unity with each other is fractured by pride, impatience, unkindness, unguarded words, selfish ambition, and so on. No wonder it's so important to Jesus. We're supposed to be reflecting the glory of the Trinity and their unity. No wonder He prays so intensely, Father, unify them because He knows that left to ourselves we'll be anything but unified. We'll not be striving together for the sake of the gospel. We'll be striving with one another to the destruction of the gospel. So, the revelation of God's glory, the glory of the unity in the Trinity is at stake in this matter of our unity.

[13:56] So, we've seen its importance, its pattern. Thirdly, let's look at its unifying factor. What is the unifying factor of our unity?

unity. You know, just to consider the broader body of Christ and yes, to some extent, even this church of Christ's people is to see something rather strange.

We're really a motley crew, aren't we? When you think about who we are, what we are, think of all the differences that we find in the church that tend to divide people in the world?

Age. We speak of a generation gap, don't we? Why? Because it's hard for the young and the old to understand and relate to each other.

So, age works against us. There's a gender gap, isn't there? Men can't understand women and women can't understand men and those differences can cause divorce and all kinds of division.

[15:02] Ethnic backgrounds may be different. Our upbringings are different. Our educational differences, economic, social status, different interests, different hobbies, different tastes, different ideas on how to do things.

And yes, even different religious backgrounds. Growing up with different doctrines, different ways of doing things in church, different practices. differences. And so, if you look at all these differences, you see that we have the makings for war.

We have the makings for rivalry. We have the makings for, yes, the very things that we see in our world today. Irreconcilable differences.

So, the question is, what is it that draws us all together as one? What is the magnetic rallying point?

And the text is telling us, or Jesus' prayer is telling us, it's nothing other than our shared union with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

[16:14] Notice, it is our union with Christ and the Father through the Spirit that unites us. Verse 21, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us. In us. Verse 22 and 23, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me.

Here's the unifying factor between us. It's that we are united to Christ. We are united with the Father through the Holy Spirit. So, are you united to Christ?

I am too. So, that means you and I are united with each other. Is God your Father? Through Jesus Christ, He's my Father.

So, what does that make you and me? But brothers and sisters in the same family and according to the Lord Jesus, a union that is tighter than any flesh and blood brotherhood.

[17:20] when Jesus was inside the home teaching and His flesh, His earthly mother and brothers came to see Him and to speak to Him.

Somebody says, your mother and brothers are outside. And Jesus says, who are my mother and brothers and sisters? And He looked at those gathered around Him and it is those who hear and do my word.

There's a tighter union here. It's not denying the physical brotherhood. It's just saying there is the spiritual brotherhood. And so, as each of us individually are united to Christ, you see, it unites us and He becomes the unifying factor in our unity.

The key ingredient, the secret to it. And that unity is stronger than all those other differences.

That factor is stronger than all the things that are pulling us apart. What we have in Christ pulls us with a stronger pull than what is pulling us apart, our differences.

[18:31] Now, it's no news for me to tell you that we live in a divided country. There's not much white between the red and blue. And there has been all kinds of efforts made.

And I recently read in World Magazine about the efforts being made in our day to tear down the walls between Republicans and Democrats. Not in Congress, but just in ordinary day folks like you and I to remove the animosity, the adversarial attitudes between them, just to get them to come to the same table with mutual respect and work out a compromise agreeable to both.

And the author of the article says that there's been failure after failure. And so a unique attempt was made.

They found Democrats and Republicans who had a common love for the same sports team. It was the Atlanta Braves last year. And so they got them together in the same room and they had refreshments and they were talking all about the Braves and highlights of their players and their skills and the great season they had.

There were high fives, mutual appreciation among them for their team and their favorite players. And all was going fine. You'd think they were the best of buds until the conversation then was directed toward political discussions and issues.

[19:56] and as we say the gloves came off. A whole different attitude and tone came to the surface and enmity and the unity you see offered by the same sports team was a pull that pulled them together but it was not strong enough to overcome the other things that were pulling them apart.

And it's just a picture of the failure of this world to be able to unify different people. Unable to do what only Jesus Christ can do and has done.

For he came to reconcile us to God and to reconcile us to each other. He alone is strong enough to make of the two one out of the two Gentile and Jew one new humanity.

unity. So in Colossians 3.11 Paul is speaking of the way that these Christians used to live in anger rage malice slander lies all those ways that destroyed unity.

That's the way you used to live in the world but here he says here in Christ here there is no Greek or Jew circumcised or uncircumcised barbarian or Scythian civilized or barbarian slave or free but Christ is all and is in all.

[21:28] He's not saying we don't have the differences they're still there but they don't divide us. Why? Because Christ is in Jew and Gentile Christ is in male and female Christ is in barbarian and civilized and we are all one in Christ Jesus he's the unifying factor that draws us together and that's good for us to remember when relationships experience tension from time to time that as I'm relating to you I realize that the same Father who chose me chose you and the same Son of God that died for me shed his blood for you and the same Holy Spirit that indwells me indwells you and

is taking us together to the same heaven the same eternal destiny so being united to Christ gives us the power needed as well to live this unity with each other in the church they in us

Father I in them so we are in Christ like a branch is in the vine and just as a branch gets its sap from that vine so we each draw grace from Christ you say but that person's impossible well then you're in you're in good shape because this kind of sap this kind of sap that is in Jesus will help us with the things that we find impossible in him we have all the love the patience the kindness the humility the gentleness and meekness and self-denial needed to respond a right to impossible people in our lives even as our Lord did so that as far as it depends upon you you can live peaceably with all men the grace that is in him in fullness is the same grace that we have received from him so Christ himself is the unifying factor that enables us to have unity with those that differ from us in the church so we've seen its importance we've seen its pattern we've seen now its unifying factor consider its effect what's the effect of this unity that Jesus prays for there's a specific reason why Jesus prays for our unity we don't have to guess we just have to read it's so that there's a so that to this prayer for unity verse 21 so that the world may believe that you have sent me father to let verse 23 to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them the disciples even as you have loved me now so far we've seen that the evangelistic mission to the world is in view as Jesus is praying protect them father

I'm leaving them in a dangerous world so they can reach the world it's behind sanctify them father because only a holy people will have something to offer to an unholy world and now it's behind this prayer for our unity father this unity this gracious fellowship would have a powerful gospel impact upon the world so unify them so that the world may believe that you have sent me so what do you think would impress the world for the gospel how many great celebrities have become Christians how many professional athletes would name the name of Christ how good looking or smart or rich or successful we Christians are is that what the world needs to cause it to sit up and take notice of our savior and his gospel and the truth that God sent Christ into the world to save sinners no according to Jesus the thing that will impress the world is the unity of his followers how long has it been since you thought about that that how we get along with other disciples of Christ has an effect upon the world whether or not they would believe that the divine mission of Christ that he really was sent by

God into this world that God really did so love the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life he reminds us of the central role of the church in evangelism yes we are to be involved in personal evangelism but here he's emphasizing the corporate effect of evangelism that is as we gather people into the church and they see the body of Christ loving each other that that has a powerful effect for evangelism what is so impressive about the church's unity upon an unbelieving world well it's when they step out of a world where it's hate and be hated and step into a world of a community of followers of Jesus that love one another sacrificially that genuinely care for one another that humbly live in unity together they sit up and take notice there's something unique here you say how unique well if we read our Bibles right it's it's the same love with which

God loves me it's it's the same love that he loves his son that he loves me and it's that love in us that the world is to see something of as they come among us and see us relating to each other there is something absolutely unique absolutely impossible to the world it is divine love it is Christ's love in us flowing through us to each other that is something attractively unique sadly there's a lot that's unique in the church that we're rather embarrassed of but this is something that we want the world to see that they might believe that the father indeed did send the son it puts on display the transforming power of the gospel of the love of God that has captured our hearts and made us lovers of him and lovers of all those who are his so

[28 : 43] I wonder if you've thought of this that the more divided our nation gets the greater our gospel opportunity is as a body because they walk out of that divided context into the church when they visit us when they see us caring for one another praying together working together serving together witnessing together they see something that they don't see in the world we believe in a supernatural gospel don't we that God the father or God the eternal son has perforated space and time and visited our planet that's not a natural event that's that's a supernatural event that he came in the person of the God man Jesus and that Jesus is more than just a good man and a good teacher we believe he's divine he is supernatural he is

God in the flesh and that by his atoning death and a supernatural resurrection to life and ascension back into heaven and that his work has supernatural power to change our eternal relationship to God and to change our hearts that's a supernatural claim that we're making in the gospel and when they see supernatural love backing up that claim that is a witness to them a supernatural unity calls attention to a supernatural Christ and a supernatural love and a supernatural salvation so this unity for which Jesus prays yes it's something in one sense hidden I'm united to Christ and you are united to Christ that's a reality that no one can see but they should see the fruit of that this unity it's to be visible isn't it it's yes there's a part of it that is invisible but the fruit of it should be very visible to the world so that they will believe that the father sent the son so that's the effect upon the world that should move us to greater unity and efforts for it you see how it raises the stakes of the importance of

of Christian unity well the last point is its enemy there is another besides Christ who knows the powerful witness of a unified church it is the evil one and Jesus prays about him in this prayer doesn't he in fact it's because of the evil one that he prays father protect them so that they may be one as we are one almost as if the evil one will make a special attack upon our unity so he prays protect them so that they may be one because if you don't protect them they won't be one well just as activists stirred up riots in our city streets a year or so ago so the enemy of the church does all he can to disturb the peace in Christ churches in his book fighting Satan Joel Beakey recounts receiving a call from an upset parishioner on a recent flight she had sat next to a man who was praying and when he finished she asked warmly so you're a Christian no he replied briskly oh I thought you were praying she persisted I was he said after a few minutes she asked sir may I ask to whom were you praying he paused and then he said I was praying to Satan why on earth would you pray to Satan she asked in amazement he replied I was praying that Satan would be successful in severing the relationship between at least 30 pastors and their congregations in North America this week now I don't mean to say that all of the evil one's activities come out in such blatant form but surely that's an evidence that there is an enemy toward our Christian unity it's not hard to see why the devil wants disunity in the church in this church it's his way of getting us to do his work for him when we're biting and devouring one another Galatians 5:15 we're destroying one another that's his goal that's his thing he's come to to destroy to kill and when we are not living in unity we're doing his work for him so he can remain behind the scenes while he joyfully watches churches self destruct you can also understand why he wants disunity in our church because it diverts us from the mission right it diverts us from the mission and even diminishes our impact for the gospel in the world George Newton said how much our blessed savior and his gospel suffers by the hot contentions of those who call themselves saints so when we're striving against one another we're not striving together for the gospel and even if we continue our gospel appeals they're blunted by the lifestyle that the world sees when they come among us we undercut the gospel message instead of adorning it and so division gives occasion to the world to belittle it why do

[35 : 03] I need a gospel to make me right with God when it has no power to make you people right with each other well it's with devilish delight that Satan stirs up trouble in Christ churches and the more effective the church the more it becomes the target of the devil to sideline it so let us not be ignorant of Satan devices he's ever trying to drive wedges between us he's ever stirring up anger seeking a foothold from which to launch further attacks against the church and so powerful and so active is the enemy of our unity that we will only remain united as a church if the father answers Jesus prayer to protect us that we may be one as he is one hence his prayer let me just give four brief applications in closing first bring your prayers in line with

Jesus prayers I've been challenged by this I don't pray enough what I see Jesus praying for here we're on praying ground when we're praying for God to protect us to sanctify us and unify us and so let's pray for God to unite us more and more to perfect us in unity in making us one to protect us from the evil one and to so unify us that the world might know that the father sent his son to save us and has loved us with the same another night bring your prayers in line with Jesus prayers secondly seek what you ask for ask and you will receive seek and you will find so so seek what you ask for are you asking for unity then seek unity that's the challenge to keep pressing after this unity of the body more and more the

Paul says to the Ephesian church in chapter 4 and verse 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace so it needs to be our intentional aim our self conscious pursuit to

preserve the unity created by none other than the Holy Spirit and so the practical outworkings of that can be developing closer relationships with each other in the body through hospitality through spending time together through praying together getting together one on one encouraging one another helping each other seek what you ask for and then third grow in the graces that strengthen unity there are certain behaviors that destroy unity and certain behaviors that strengthen unity and in that same chapter Ephesians 4 where he tells us to make every effort to maintain this unity he gives us some of the graces that strengthen it be completely humble and gentle be patient bearing with one another in love you know that bearing with one another loving forbearance that's a rare grace but a powerful grace for unity forbearance if we would not give or take offense that would solve

I think 90% of unity problems in the church so so let's consider that just very briefly let's be careful to give no unnecessary offense proverbs 15 18 a hot tempered man stirs up dissension but a patient man calms a spirit calms a quarrel so there is this giving unnecessary offense stirring up dissension in our words in our body language in our actions give no unnecessary offense but then also let us be very slow to take offense even when someone's giving we don't have to take it do we remember my father telling us that you don't have to someone offends you you don't have to pick it up you can just leave it lay and it just fizzles out that's what we're called to Proverbs 12 16 a fool shows his annoyance at once somebody does something you're all annoyed and you show it at once but a prudent man overlooks an insult there's the insult and I'm not looking at it I'm overlooking it I'm ignoring it I'm acting as if I'd never heard what you said or what you did Proverbs 19 11 a man's wisdom gives him patience it is to his glory his honor to overlook an offense there's the offense it's a sure offense it shouldn't have been said about you done to you but it's to your honor to overlook it to not pick up the offense so how much can you overlook how much can you bear with how much can you take you know Jesus took a lot for you and he still takes a lot from us doesn't he he still bears with us he hasn't given up on us well then let's abide in him and learn from him to go the second mile so as not to give or to take offense where the truth is not being jeopardized so we grow in the graces that strengthen unity forbearance and then lastly let's let's lay out this application to long for heaven where this prayer will be answered in full indeed in one sense all of these prayers have their answer in heaven where we'll be absolutely protected from the evil one there will be nothing unclean allowed into heaven and sanctified all will be fully sanctified in heaven and unified oh it will be perfected in that day heaven is a world of love and only love where heaven where love reigns and righteousness reigns no divisions in the one body of [41 : 51] Christ in heaven and then we'll see just more clearly what a supernatural thing this unity is and forever enjoy how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity so I began by asking you how important unity is to you and I return to that question now having seen how important it is to the Lord Jesus having seen something of its effect and its power let this side of your Lord praying four times for our unity exert a constant influence upon our behavior toward each other let it stop you from getting in the last word let it keep you from letting distance grow between us let's suffer much let's lose much let's put up with much rather than to fracture the unity of the body and when you think it's costing you too much visit Calvary once more and see what it cost him he died for our unity he died to fulfill these prayer requests and he's simply asking the father on the basis of what he is about to do and just hours from the time of his prayer on the basis of that father you would protect them you would sanctify them you would unify them well how good it is when brethren dwell together in unity stand and let's sing that song together father the bible tells us that god is love and as we read your word it reveals that for eternity the father and son and the holy spirit have been forever loving one another and it is a glorious reality to think that you would set that love upon us that same love with which you love the son and with that same love for him you would love us and send him into the world to save us and to die for us to live for us to rise for us to now pray for us and that with that same love you would send the spirit to our hearts to wake us up from our depravity and our inability to love you as we heard in the Sunday school hour and to create that love in us to come by the spirit and live in us and produce the fruit of the spirit which is love right away so thank you for that we we wouldn't have any of this love if it weren't for you for you and your gracious love I thank you for this body of

Christ I thank you for the love that I have enjoyed almost 40 years now from many of these people all that time some of them less than that but Lord you have been good to me and the love that you have shown me through them we know there's an evil one who wants to destroy that love and we

know we're no match for him so we thank you for the Savior's prayers we ask you to look on him not only to pardon us but look on him listen to him and answer his prayer for our unity and protect us from the evil one that we might have our love perfected into one that the world might see and might come to know that same love that is found in Christ alone send us on our way rejoicing then in him we pray in his name amen now we're dismissed