

Sunday, December 18, 2022

This is the nineteenth and final sermon in a series of sermons on John 13-17 (“The Farewell Discourse”).

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| 1. Jesus Loves His own (13:1) [7/5/2020] | 12. The Hatred of the World (15:18- 16:4a) [1/9/2022] |
| 2. Foot Washing (13:2-17) [8/30/2020] | 13. The Work of the Holy Spirit (16:4b-15) [2/27/2022] |
| 3. Identifying the Traitor (13:18-30) [10/18/2020] | 14. Your Sorrow Shall Be Turned into Joy (16:16-24) [4/17/2022] |
| 4. Christ’s Glory and How We Are To Live In His Temporary Absence (13:31-38) [12/6/2020] | 15. Direct Access to the Father (16:25-32) [6/12/2022] |
| 5. Preparing a Place (14:1-4) [1/31/2021] | 16. He’s Spoken That You Might Have Peace (16:33) [7/24/2022] |
| 6. The Only Way to the Father (14:5-7) [3/21/2021] | <i>The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)</i> |
| 7. Seeing God (14:8-14) [5/9/2021] | 17. Jesus Prays for Himself (17:1-5) [9/11/2022] |
| 8. Peace and Comfort (14:15-27) [6/27/2021] | 18. Jesus Prays for His Present People (17:6-19) [10/30/2022] |
| 9. Loving God (14:28-31) [8/15/2021] | 19. Jesus Prays for All His People (17:20-26) |
| 10. Abiding in Christ, the True Vine (15:1-11) [10/3/2021] | |
| 11. Friends of Christ (15:12-17) [11/21/2021] | |

The so-called “Farewell Discourse” of Christ begins in John 13 in the Upper Room. It continues in John 15 as Jesus and His 11 faithful apostles walk through the streets of Jerusalem. It ends with a prayer in John 17 near the brook Cedron. This is all taking place on the Thursday night and possibly into the early hours of Friday morning on the week of Christ’s crucifixion. Even though I’ve spread out 19 sermons across nearly 2.5 years, the actual event I’ve been covering took place over the course of only a few hours. We are finally to the last sermon, and today’s text is a fitting way to end a most glorious and comforting part of scripture:

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:20-26)

In this passage, Jesus makes it clear in verses 20-23 that He is including His future people in His prayer (i.e., it is not limited to those 11 men who are present with Him). That includes each and every one of God’s elect, in particular, from then until now, including those listening to this sermon. He is praying for us, personally. His petition is that we would be one. He then

expresses His will that all His people will see Him in glory (v. 24), and finally concludes with some words about His future work in continuing to declare His Father's name (v. 25-26).

They All May Be One

“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23)

There are a lot of passages in scripture that are abused and twisted beyond recognition by phony “Christians,” and this is one of the top ones. The United Church of Christ, for example, uses words from this passage of scripture on their crest (it says “that they may all be one”). For those who don't know, the UCC was supporting sodomy before it was popular. If you go to their web site today, your eyes will immediately be assailed by two lesbians holding hands and someone holding a sodomite rainbow with the word “LOVE” on it. It is people like this, along with all the so-called “ecumenical” movement, who will throw all Biblical doctrine and practice out the window and call that “Christian unity.” These are the people who would say that Ahab was right – Elijah really WAS the one that was troubling Israel (1 Kings 18:17-18).

So, let's go over what Jesus actually teaches here. He says that He's not praying only for the 11 apostles, “but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Understand that this prayer by Christ is in reference to everything He just said in chapters 13-16 – this means that if you believe on Christ, everything in all these chapters applies to you personally, and Jesus is praying to the Father here for you personally. He prays for believers, and His first petition is “that they all may be one.” Some of the characteristics of this oneness are:

1. The thing that unites us, the thing that we are “one” about, is Christ. We believe on Christ through the Word that the apostles faithfully delivered. There are lots of groups in this world that are unified around a particular thing – sports teams, clubs, military units, political parties, sin, etc. But those are all worldly things – at best, frivolous; at worst, open rebellion against God. Notably, you'll see that when it comes to rebelling against God, the world couches it in terms of love and unity. We saw a good example of this at the freakshow that Joe Biden put on at the White House last week – it was a theatrical display, united around the sin of same-sex marriage, and united in hatred of God and neighbor...with a lot of talk about “love” (20+ times). He had the audacity to conclude the speech by invoking the name of God: “God bless you all. And may God

protect our troops.” This is the unity and love of the world. The people of God, on the other hand, are unified as it relates to their love of God and His Word.

2. He prays for the oneness that we have in the church to be like the oneness found in the Godhead – “as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” When I see something like this, I feel wholly inadequate to talk about it, because what finite man can explain the union between the eternal Father and Son? But let me try to pluck out a few characteristics of it that might help.
 - a. It is characterized by holiness, righteousness and truth. There is no sin involved in this union. There are no lies. The Holy Father and Holy Son are joined together with one another – they aren’t inviting Satan into the union because they’re so open-minded and tolerant. Anthony Burgess: *“The Scripture does not commend the kind of unity and love which lets all errors and profaneness alone, but unity in that which is good, unity in that which is truth and holiness.”*
 - b. There is a diversity in the union. By that, I mean that the Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Father. They are unique Persons and engage in different functions, but they are unified in essence and deity and purpose. Similarly, we are one body, but many members. The ear is not the eye, and so forth, but we move forward with the same purpose.
 - c. It is a unity that is characterized by love. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). The Father has loved the Son from everlasting and we are to love one another. Our business should be to endure all things for the elect’s sake (2 Timothy 2:10).
3. He prays that we would be one in the Godhead – “that they also may be one in us.” This is another deep mystery, but we are united to God through Christ. He is the Head and we are the body. He is the Husband and we are the Bride – one flesh. Of course, this will be fully manifested in the last day, when He will “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:27).
4. Our being one is a result of the glory that the Son has given to us, which is the same glory that the Father had given to Him - “the glory which thou gavest me I have given them.” This glory is the glory that was given to Christ as our Mediator and Savior, when He “was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7). There are a lot of facets to this but consider this: He humbled Himself and He came to minister to us. He was absolutely devoted to doing the will of God – “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” (John 4:34). He lived a life of humiliation and suffered for us. All of this was part of His glory that the Father gave to Him, and as imperfectly as we reflect this glory, this is part of the glory that He has given to us while we sojourn here. Specifically, there will never be complete unity as long as there is pride, envy, disobedience, or unwillingness to suffer for Him.

5. Our oneness is based on Christ indwelling us – “I in them.” As Christ indwells us, the natural result of that should be that we would be one. I think it’s fairly self-evident that if we all have the same Spirit, we would all be unified at all times, unless something hindered that – and the thing that hinders it is our indwelling sin and ignorance.
6. His prayer is that we will ultimately “be made perfect in one.” If the ultimate goal here is for us to be made perfect in one, that would imply that we are currently not perfect in one. It would imply an ongoing process, and something that must be diligently tended to and worked at. This perfection of unity will not be fully realized until heaven, though we ought to strive for it on earth. There are at least two aspects to this. The first is that it will be perfect in the sense that there will be no breaches – there will be no disunity. The second is that it will be perfect in the sense of completeness – we will be completely united together into one body. I believe that one of the things He’s praying for here is for all His people to be gathered together into one complete body.
7. He prays that our union with one another and with God will be visible to the world and would result in the world knowing and believing that the Father sent the Son and that the Father loves us as He loved the Son. This means that one of the foundational things that we are unified about is the Father sending the Son. All kinds of important doctrines are tied up in this – the relationship between the Father and Son (in the Trinity), who the Son is (very God and very man), why the Father sent the Son (because He loves us), what the Father sent the Son to do (to give eternal life to as many as the Father had sovereignly given to Him). It includes the doctrines of sin, mankind, redemption, justification, election, limited atonement, the sovereignty of God, heaven, hell, etc. All these things are tied up in the Son being sent by the Father.

We also must be unified when it comes to the Father loving us as He loved the Son. You’re not going to find any sloppy agape “God loves everyone” being taught at this church – instead, you will find accurate notions about the love of God. He loves us as He loved His Son because we were chosen in the Son before the foundation of the world. It is an eternal, boundless, discriminating love. God doesn’t love everyone with that love. And those whom He loves will love Him in return, and we will love our brethren – “We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” (1 John 4:19-21).

When the church is one, we are a reflection of the oneness that exists in the Godhead, particularly in matters related to redemption and His love for His people (because that is why the Father sent the Son – to redeem His loved ones). I can’t begin to comprehend all the ways in which this is true, but I know it at least includes what we preach and how

we behave. We must preach accurately about the redemption of Christ and the love of God, and we must live as redeemed people, obeying God and loving one another even as He loved us (that is, live as “new creatures” – 2 Corinthians 5:17).

When the world looks on this church, they should see a united group of redeemed people who are saved by the grace of God. They should see that we are the result of the Father sending the Son, and His eternal love for us in Him. And frankly, every time we obscure or mar that by causing disunity (through such things as pride or a contentious spirit), we are acting at odds to what Jesus is praying for here. I know that God doesn't need us – but I also know that Jesus prays right here that our being one would result in the world believing that the Father sent the Son and that He loves His own. I take that to mean that our unity is a means by which some of God's elect will be called out of the world to have true, saving faith. But it also means that the wicked, unbelieving world, in seeing His church, will ultimately have no choice but to acknowledge that these things about God are true.

And just a couple more thoughts about this. First, I said this last time, and I'll say it again – this language of unity makes no sense other than in the context of the church! Singletons roaming around outside the authority of a local church, calling themselves “street preachers” and “evangelists,” are the antithesis of what Jesus is saying here. Second, this gives us insight into why our church is under constant assault by Satan. Is there any other church today that is subject to the lies, misrepresentations, vilification, demonization, marginalization, etc., that this church is subject to? Satan wants to obfuscate what we're all about because he's well aware of what Jesus prays for here.

Now, there are a few realities that we have to face while we sojourn in the earth. First, understand that by the nature of having been called by God, we are one. We didn't do anything to make that happen – that is wholly a work of God where He has formed us into the body of Christ. However, we have a duty to work at maintaining unity in the church, as we see from the frequent admonitions and commands to do so. Here is one excellent example:

**“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”
(Ephesians 4:3-6).**

Our duty is often made difficult because “we see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12); we have different levels of understanding; we are corrupt; etc. In heaven, we will have perfect unity. On earth, we will not. So, I would like to present a few practical points:

- There are fundamental doctrines on which there can be no disagreement. They are non-negotiable. For example, in Galatians 2, regarding some false brethren who had infiltrated the church, Paul says: “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” (v. 5). Their false teaching was so dangerous that it couldn’t go unaddressed for even an hour. When you’re talking about a false gospel or any other heresy, that can’t be tolerated. Anthony Burgess: *“There is a sinful and foolish pity when people do not wish to have justice done against notorious offenders, but this pity to the wicked is in reality cruelty to the good - for anyone who is pitiful to the wolf is cruel to the sheep. So there is a counterfeit unity and love when, because of this false peace and agreement, no damnable heresy and no evil way is treated with the severity it deserves, and no scriptural way is taken to stop its progress.”* Even when Peter started going down the wrong path, Paul immediately nipped that in the bud: “I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.” (Galatians 2:11). However, there are other issues that do not require that we have rigid uniformity on, and we would actually be causing disunity by trying to enforce that everyone hold the same opinion. See Romans 14, for example, which covers matters of conscience (specifically in eating and drinking): “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” (v. 19). The Lord must give us discretion to know the difference.
- Being of one mind is a continual process and it requires work. If a person is raising an issue or questioning some doctrine or practice or behavior, our default ought to be that charity “thinketh no evil” (1 Corinthians 13:5), which means that we should not assume that the person is trying to upset the apple cart. Instead, we should assume that the person is sincerely trying to make sure that everything we do, say and think is Biblical. On the other side of the coin, we must not tolerate a contentious soul. “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (1 Corinthians 11:16). It’s no accident that right in the middle of a bunch of brotherly love talk, Paul suddenly says: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17). Anthony Burgess: *“A man cannot demonstrate himself to be in the flesh and devoid of God's Spirit by anything other than a contentious, divisive spirit. Some people are restless; they cannot live without an enemy.”* There’s nothing more deadly to the unity of a church than a contentious person. Again, the Lord must give us discretion to know the difference.
- Please remember that Satan is our enemy – we ought to not be enemies of one another. He is out to disrupt our unity. “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31-32). The word “you” is in the plural. Satan desired to have the whole group of apostles, to

sift them as wheat. He wanted to cause divisions and separations in the group. Apparently, Peter was the weak link at that time, and the Lord Jesus prayed for him personally (the word “thee” is singular). The only reason that this church exists in unity is because of the intercession of Christ for us. [Note: He prayed for Peter... not Judas.]

They May Behold My Glory

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:24)

You may see here that this prayer of Christ spans eternity. Those “whom thou hast given me” are those ones who were “chosen...in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). The love that the Father had for the Son was “before the foundation of the world.” And His will is that those people would “be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.” And of course, that is into eternity future – “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thess. 4:17).

You’ll note that He uses the word “will” here – “I **will** that they also...” The word means “to be determined, to desire, to take delight in, to have pleasure in.” He wants us to be with him where He is – He’s preparing a place for us so He can receive us to Himself (John 14:2-3) - this is His greatest desire! This is an amazing thing. If I asked you all if you desired to be with the Lord to behold His glory, I’m going to guess that you would say yes. But to have Him desire to have you with Him, beholding His glory? That’s another matter entirely. Why would He want to have you there? Well, you are His purchased possession (Ephesians 1:14), and His will is that you would be with Him where He is. He delights in you (Proverbs 3:12). Now to be clear, He doesn’t delight in you in your capacity as a vile sinner – He delights in you in your capacity as a redeemed sinner...a sinner who has been chosen and gifted to Him by the Father...a sinner clothed in His righteousness.

He tells us that He wants us to be there so “that they may behold my glory.” Earlier in this sermon, I talked about this glory that the Father had given Him but let me add that we’re going to behold Him as our victorious Redeemer, in all His perfections. And the idea here is that we are not just going to look at it, but we are going to experience and participate in it:

**“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”
(Philippians 3:20-21)**

**“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”
(1 John 3:2)**

Everything that He suffered, every time He intercedes for us, every blessing He gives us, every correction He administers – all of it is designed so that He might bring “many sons unto glory.” (Hebrews 2:10). And in a sense, every time one of His saints dies, it’s an answer to this prayer – “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15).

Declaring His Name

“O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:25-26)

He concludes by addressing Him as His “righteous Father,” which is an appeal to His justice and righteousness in hearing and answering His prayer for His own, and the righteousness of God in making a distinction between the world and His own which are in the world, which distinction He brings up again. Because Christ satisfied His justice, it is a righteous thing for God to love, choose, redeem, and glorify a group of people, while rejecting the rest. He’s not praying for the world – He’s praying for His own. The wicked world does not know God the Father, but Jesus knows Him, and His people know Him. Why? Because it was His good pleasure to declare Him to us! “Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” (Matthew 11:27). Furthermore, we have a promise here that Jesus will continue to declare His name, which He does through the Holy Spirit. And to what end does He continue to declare His name? He gives two: 1. That the love of God would be in us (the same love that He loved Jesus with). 2. That Jesus Himself would be in us. He’s talking about making sure that every last one of His elect is called, shepherded, and delivered safely into glory – that each one personally has God declared to him. He’s going to continue to work through the Holy Ghost, declaring the name of God, making us understand that we are loved by the Father in the same way and to the same degree that He loved the Son, and giving us that unspeakable privilege of living our lives in union with Christ.

So, we have now reached the conclusion to His prayer, and really the conclusion to the whole discourse. We have come full circle – the whole thing started with this: “having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1). This whole thing has been about Jesus loving His own to the end and instructing us in how we are to prosper between His two advents and praying for us to ensure that His instruction is efficacious. On that note, let me begin in John 18 and read what happened after His prayer as we do the Lord’s Supper.