

KEEPING WITH UNITY

GBC EQUIPPING HOUR | APRIL 19, 2020



Class 2 – The Depth of Unity (John 17:20-23)

PURPOSE: Local church and global church sustainability.

Introduction

In the previous Class 1, the theme of spiritual unity *took flight*, touching on the Psalms of Ascents (Psalm 133) giving us a sense of this rapturous fellowship rising up to the holy mountain of Triune God.

For this Class 2, the theme of spiritual unity *plummets the depths* of the mind of Christ, meeting our Lord as he earnestly appeals to his Father for his present and future followers.

I. The Extent of Unity into Time (John 17:20-21a)

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, **that they also may be in us...**”

A. Two Groups Separated by Time

1. *The First Apostles*: Specifically it is the Twelve Disciples gathered with Christ in the upper room, minus Judas who left earlier (cf., John 17:6 and 17:17 with 13:30-31).
2. *The Future Believers*: Earlier in John 10:16, Jesus tells his Jewish counterparts, he has “...other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also...” Since no outsiders, or Gentiles, were widely converted during Jesus’ earthly ministry, we must deduce he was referring to a still future event after his ascension –likely referring to the Acts of the Apostles ministering to, increasingly, non-Jewish converts coming into the “fold.”

B. Two Groups United and Indivisible

1. While the two groups of (1) the early apostles and (2) future Christian converts did have obvious differences between them (e.g., both in gifting and weight of authority), these are not sharp contrasts in the eternal scheme of things.
2. Just as there is not a sharp contrast between the Father and the Son (albeit there are distinctives), there isn't to be a sharp contrast between the early church apostles and, say, the current 21st century believers of today. Roman Catholics refer to Peter as *St. Peter*, but we could just as much refer to him as *brother Peter*, yet while holding his office in high esteem.

II. **The Extent of Unity before the World** (John 17:21b with 23b)

“...so that **the world may believe** that you have sent me...

²³ ... so that the world may know that you sent me **and loved them even as you loved me.**”

A. Missions as an Individualistic Aspiration

1. Obviously in the N.T. there are some Christians who have the gift of evangelism.
2. Obviously when the Apostle (brother!) Paul went on mission he didn't take the whole church with him. Space, time, energy limitations are real.

B. Missions as a Church Movement

1. The church body has a special endowment of God's love through the clear revelation of who God is. But this isn't to be kept a secret from the secular city surrounding us; instead it is to captivate their minds in the same way Christ convicted the souls of his day.

2. The church body knows God the Father's faithful, patient, shepherding care on a deeply personal level. According to John 17 God's supreme favor of his beloved Son is seamlessly passed onto believers! Even without supernatural miracles going on, this wondrous connection with the Divine should have a startling effect on the watching world.

III. The Extent of Unity with the Godhead (John 17:22-23a)

“The **glory** that you have given me I have given to them, **that they may be one even as we are one**,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become **perfectly one**...”

A. The Glory from the Father Given to Christ

1. *Analogy of a Marathon Race*: since the start of his incarnation Jesus fought off all earthly, worldly provocations to stray off from his path to Calvary. In John 17:4-5 Jesus can already see the finish line –his death, burial, and **ascension** (“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”⁵ And now, Father, **glorify me** in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”).
2. *Imminent Future as an Already Past Thing*: Jesus is praying to God the Father in a voice which transcends time. He intercedes for his cherished followers *before* becoming the Sacrifice. Normally we don't break out the Champaign bottles until the ribbon has been broken. For Jesus, he's already there. He's already 'crossed the Rubicon,' so to speak. Judas will soon return with the soldiers.

B. The Glory from the Son Given to the Church

1. While the church *glorified* does not equate to us becoming gods, or being added to the Trinity...it

comes close. There is a fellowship we will have with the Trinity in Heaven which will surpass any angelic experience. We will not become Trinity. But we will know the triumph of Christ's glorification, with the Father, in our inner most being, inside and out.

2. In Revelation 3:21 the Lord says, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to **sit with me on my throne**, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." This completes the thought of John 17:23 for all eternity.

Conclusion

Where does our Christian unity stem from? According to John 17 it stems from Jesus' intercessory prayer for us. This puts everything in perspective. After John 17 when Jesus goes to the cross he is going to make atonement for *a unified church*, and not just individual Christian conversion experiences.

Keeping with Unity Course Outline (Tentative):

- The Ascent of Unity (Psalm 133)
- The Depth of Unity (John 17:20-23)
- The Body of Unity (Ephesians 4:1-16)
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *Ligonier Ministries*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with the *Southern Baptist Convention*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *9 Marks Ministries & T4G*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *The Gospel Coalition*