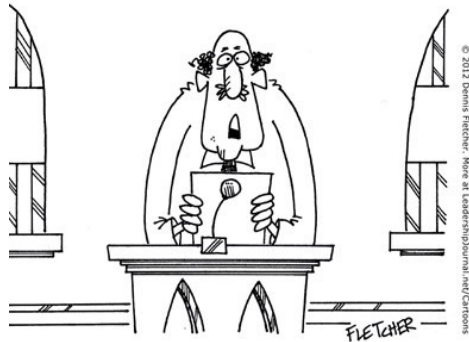


John 17:20-26 UNITY: Of Primary Importance!

Packer clip...[What is Christian Unity? - YouTube](#)

I have really appreciated J. I. Packer's comments and they have provided a great starting point into what I believe is an important matter. It was very apparent to me, as I thought about what is among the most pressing of topics and passages to speak about in this season, I have been constantly drawn to John 17. It is as if for me, Jesus' prayer transcends the course of time and is as if he still prays this prayer for his church, today. And as such I want us to see, what above all else is important to God.



"... and the church unity workshop has been postponed until the deacons can agree on the date, time, and color of the participant's name tags."

We're blessed to not have the sorts of debates depicted here.

However, we've been – and are – dealing with a lot – to understate matters. Covid, vaccines, Conversion Therapy bills, assisted dying bills, ongoing mental health matters, high rates of suicide, I could go on. A lot!

Opinions abound...different versions of truth...and the risk's associated within all of that – as we as Christians on some things carry the strongest opinions – is the risk to our unity. I am most definitely not saying it's wrong to hold opinions. I have opinions. But I want us all to ask ourselves where is Christ in all of this? Where and how is the word of God guiding me, in all this? How am I believing that God is sovereign in all of this? Am I committed to unity above all else?!

To repeat a relevant illustration, again from Packer, he talks about church unity being like one hundred pianos, all shapes and sizes and models all tuned to the same tuning fork, that are automatically in tune with each other. They are in tune (have unity) by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred Christians, each one being tuned to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be.¹ Being tuned first into Christ, brings unity.

In my ministry experience I do not remember a time, like now, where because of the issues we are all engaged in, there is potential damage to our unity, the breakdown of relationships, the

¹ Adapted from: [Sermon Illustrations](#)

disengagement and, *btw*, disillusionment of church, and, losing sight of our mission. I don't need to remind you this is absolutely an area where the enemy of the church will seek to kill and destroy. Satan wants nothing more than Gods people at odds with each other, warring with each other.

So in encouraging you today from Jesus' prayer in John 17, I want to remind you of what is of primary importance above and beyond any opinion, political view or theological perspective. Unity. Unity, *btw*, never at the cost of compromising God, the gospel, or the word of God.

When Jesus prayed, and continues to pray – as he intercedes on our behalf – we cannot think for a moment he doesn't know or see what's going on. As we pray about the issues in front of us – I can 'hear' Jesus speaking back to us, "yes know, I hear, it's hard, but keep your unity". This is the hallmark for FBC, right now. Up there with love, grace, spirit-filledness.

It's not up for grabs, not optional. Unity is what we have in Christ, when we're in Christ, but that doesn't happen in a vacuum of non-participation on our part. It's also something we must value and protect and be – in our unity – an answer to Jesus' prayer. We have to stay together.

It is the "*good and pleasant*" unity...people living together where the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore, unity (Ps. 133)

John 17:20-26 *"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 glory² that 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."

We can see with abundant clarity in Jesus prayer, what is foremost on his heart and what is to be foremost in the hearts of Christians. Unity, oneness, mission, glory...are very much at the heart of Jesus' prayer in John 17

Think of our engagement today with this passage as being led by Jesus in a prayer gathering, ...the disciples are still in that upper room, fresh off Jesus' act of washing their feet (John 13), then the revelation of betrayal among their ranks, and being told by Jesus that their love for one-another will bear witness to their love for him.

² 1391= Doxa – opinion, view, praise, honour, majesty, magnificence, excellence, pre-eminence

They've been told that remaining connected to Jesus the true Vine is the only way to produce fruit (John 15), and that when he departs they will not be alone, the helper, the Holy Spirit will come and *he will guide them/us, into all truth John 16*).

And then (in John 17) Jesus shifts from conversation, to prayer. And note that this prayer, is the very last prayer he prays for believers before being arrested. Makes it worth listening to!

What is Jesus' intent behind his prayer? He wants his believers to express in their lives what he expressed in his life and work whilst on earth, to bring him glory. Which is what precisely?

(Vv. 21-22) may be one – just as the Father and Jesus (might add the HS) are one.

(Vv. 21, 23 & 26) Jesus asks that we, be in them, so that the world may believe that the Father sent the son.

(v.23) 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.

(v. 24) "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory

Let me summarise those: *Oneness, Witness, Glory and the one thing that ties all these together: Complete Unity*. That what Jesus prayed. That's our mandate! It's just those 2 words we're going to focus on in the next few minutes.

What is Complete Unity?

Notice first the word that comes before unity: *"complete"*. That is perfected, finished, it is accomplished, *unity*. "Unity" and Jesus has said this in the prayer, simply means one. The essence of his prayer is that ultimately our *unity* is a reflection of the *oneness* of the trinity... *"that they may be one as we are one"*, Jesus prayed

To gain a fuller understanding of what Jesus has prayed let's look at some other key verses in the NT on the theme of unity...

Rom. 15:5 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Cor. 1:10 *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

Eph. 4:3 *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Col. 3:12-14 *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

When weighed together with what Jesus has prayed...unity is what we are to have, what we live for and what we put effort into. Now it's important we understand unity is not uniformity. We don't

think the same, look alike, or do the same things. Unity doesn't mean we don't disagree, or there is an absence of confrontation. As we navigate our way through some big issues, individually, and corporately, we need to be aware of the kinds of things that can/could threaten our unity. Because we're part of a body, bought with the precious blood of Christ. Serving self, serving my own ends, divisive talk, gossip, being intolerant of others views when we expect tolerance (think of things listed in Gal. 5), a low view of God, his word, his commandments, low view of grace to us and therefore for others (and you'll think of other things) ...all work against unity *and are threats to complete unity*. Whereas unity is willingly putting our will aside for God's will.

And furthermore is why Paul said (Eph. 4:3) "*make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit*" – suggesting that, though there is work and effort required on our part, and we are constantly on our guard regarding threats, when we commit to unity, we are activating the unity Jesus prayed for.

So whilst we understand what complete unity is, and why it's important, let's also address the question *why unity is a powerful argument for the reality of Jesus?* I.e. What did/does Jesus want the world to see as people look on at the church?

Listen to Jesus again (v23): ²¹*May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* ²²*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one...*

...so what Jesus is praying comes with a witness and missional responsibility: "*complete unity*" is not just an in-house thing. Think of it this way: our unity communicates to those who don't know Jesus, that the Jesus we believe in, the Jesus we worship, the Jesus who is so important to us that we are committed to complete unity, the Jesus who loves us, is the Jesus they must "believe" in.

The *integrity* and *credibility* of our witness for Jesus rests squarely on the shoulders of us, Christians. "*May they*" – Christians – "*be in us*" – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – "*so the world will believe*". We may not enjoy the thought, but we're all part of a church family. And what each of us does, how we conduct ourselves, how we treat people in the church and others in the community, is ALL, either letting the world know that Jesus is awesome, or not. What we do affects unity and unity affects what we do.

I don't think any of us would want to be an obstruction to the mission of God, quite the opposite, our heart is for more of God, to see people come to faith in Christ. *Our unity has mission implications*, positive and negative. *How does your life communicate to the world you are a Christ-follower? How do we as a church communicate to the world, we are Christ-followers?*

What then do we do, to answer Jesus' prayer for Complete Unity?

What are we prepared to do for unity? Let me answer that from Jesus' prayer and the other passages I've given you today:

- *Be in God (John 17:21) – be a Christ follower...*

- *Have the same attitude as Jesus (Rom. 15:5)*
- *Have the love for others, the father has for the son (John 17:26)*
- *Be cautious of divisive talk and attitudes (1 Cor. 1:10)*
- *Agree on the things that really matter to God (1 Cor. 1:10)*
- *Be a witness for Christ in everything you do (John 17:21, 23)*
- *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3)*

Final comment for you...complete unity and our emphasis for it and our commitment to it, will make no sense or will mean little to us without first recognising Christ sacrificed his life for it. It is through his death we are one. It is his death, resurrection...that unites us (*Rom. 6:5; Phil 2; Eph. 4*) Therefore, in matters of judgment, opinions, and theological perspectives, as we might debate issues, and consider our conduct, he, his word – this, lamp to our feet and light for our path – his truth is the starting place for all these, not, what we think or feel. *Christ is the starting place for complete unity.* It's about what he says, what he wants us thinking, how he wants us living, because it's only his glory that matters. That's the goal of unity.

I want to keep my concluding prayer very simple today, using the words of Paul from Col. 3:12-14, Eph. 4, & Rom. 15...do pray with me.

Conclusion

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, may we be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Lord that we might bear with each other and forgive one another, particularly if any of us has a grievance against someone. Lord may we Forgive as you have forgiven us. And over all these virtues may we put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. May we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, so that with one mind and one voice we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.