

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 311
Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21
Today's verses: John 17:20-23
Today's Topic: That They Might Be One
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John 17:20-23 MKJV And I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who shall believe on Me through their word, (21) that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. (22) And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one, (23) I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.

This is Jesus' classic prayer for Christian unity. He prays for a complete spiritual unity of all true believers: "those also who shall believe on Me through their word". The result of such unity would be "that the world may believe" (v.21,23), perfection (v.23) and a clear demonstration of the love of God (v.23).

Thus we must remove all obstacles to unity between born-again, bible-believing Christians. I do not say that we should have unity with heretics, cults or doubters of the faith. After all, the unity Jesus prays for is among believers. However among those who get this study and the millions like them, there should be unity.

This does not mean that we should all belong to the same church, or even to the same denomination, or even have identical beliefs – but we should sense that we are one, in unity sharing faith in Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

The early church faced challenges to unity along racial, doctrinal lines - as well as the immature following of human personalities. To these Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:1-6 MKJV I therefore, the prisoner in *the* Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, (2) with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, (3) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (4) *There is* one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling, (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, (6) one God and Father of all, who *is* above all and through all and in you all.

The keys to unity are "lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance and love", conversely the keys to disunity are the precise opposites - haughtiness, arrogance, intolerance, impatience and hatred. Unity is thus an attitude towards others. How we handle it when others differ from us or disappoint us is critical to Christian unity. Does one bad apple ruin a whole denomination for you? Does one erratic charismatic make all charismatics evil? Or does one legalistic Baptist make all Baptists Pharisees? I hope not!

We need to show forbearance over doctrinal differences that are not at the core of the faith. Statements such as "I cannot tolerate post-millennialists" or "I cannot stand Arminians" are simply far from being Christian. Love should cover such differences. You may disagree with the doctrine but you should not reject the person who holds it. The Good Samaritan showed great kindness to a battered Jew despite profound, irreconcilable religious differences.

Thus loving our neighbour means seeing the person and their needs rather than categorizing them solely by the doctrines they hold. One of the deep questions of the ancient world was “who should we love and who should we hate?” The parable of the Good Samaritan gives the answer that we should love everyone – even heretics (for the Samaritans were viewed as such by the Jews), even people who are culturally different, and even people of other religions.

If we are to love our neighbour then how much more should we love our brothers and sisters in the Lord! How much more should we strive to be at one with them in all lowliness and meekness – even if their church is bigger than ours and they teach slightly different doctrines?

It is fine to teach and say “we hold such and such a doctrine here” or even to say “we do not believe in Y.” However to say “all churches that believe Y, are Satanic especially the church Z” is a statement that should only be uttered with great caution – and then only used of cults.

We should strive to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity is an effort, it takes work and the work of forgiveness and forbearance and humility is among the hardest work of all. But it is worth it and it fulfils a deep desire of the Lord Jesus that His Church be as one, even as He and the Father are as one. One deep abiding spiritual essence flowing between all members of the body of Christ, one blood in all our veins, the blood that cleanses us from sin.

“And I have given them the glory which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one” – Jesus give us glory so that we might be one. What glory is this? It is the glory of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the glory of the love of God. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan He was given a glory – the glorious power of the presence of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the glory of the Church, the blessing of Abraham, and is that which works miracles in our midst (Galatians 3:1-14).

The Holy Spirit is the “ministry of glory” who works in us so that we are transformed “from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:8,18) and is the “Spirit of God and of glory” (1 Peter 4:14). Thus it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit that builds unity in God’s Church and keeps us in the bond of peace.

Given the above – truly spiritual people should be passionate about keeping peace in the body of Christ and building and maintaining unity between believers. Contentious, divisive Christians are thus not spiritual for the Holy Spirit is not a divider of Christ. Divisiveness is carnal (see Galatians 5:19-21, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4) and is not “worthy” behaviour (Ephesians 4:1).

When we do obey the Holy Spirit and dwell in unity then the outcomes will be astonishing. “I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Unity will result in us being in such a cloud of glory and of love that we will be “made perfect” and the world will know that Jesus was sent by God and that God loves His people.

This is worth aiming for, which is why Jesus desired it so passionately, and why He prayed for it before going to the cross, and why John wrote it down in his gospel. Unity gets our prayers answered (Matthew 18:19) and God glorified and the saints perfected. Therefore let us move toward it in the Spirit with all patience, forbearance, long-suffering, lowliness and love.

Blessings,

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