Bethesda Bedok Brethren Church/ BP Combined Good Friday Service Dr. Rick Griffith

25 September 1994; 25 March 2016 Single Message

NIV 30 Minutes

Title

**Why Unity?**

***John 17:20-26***

**Topic:** Unity

**Subject:** Christian unity

**Complement:** is evangelistic.

**Purpose:** Listeners will work towards unity in the church to show God’s love to unbelievers.

# Introduction

### If you had but one day left to live, what would you do?

One Day…

#### I bet most of us would want to *be with the people who matter the most* to us—our family. Then I think we would *tell them the things that the most* to us —that we love them and what our aspirations are for their future after we’re gone.

#### Jesus was fully human, so he was not too far off from this depiction. Knowing he had less than a day to live, he sought to be with his “family” of disciples. In an “upper room,” he then poured into them the most valuable teaching he could. We call it the “Upper Room Discourse” and we find this in John 13–17 at the heart of John’s gospel.

Overview

Of John

Upper

Room

Jesus

“Family”

#### This is Jesus’ longest sermon in the gospels. He tells them *be connected* to him while hated by the world (13:1–16:4), *be encouraged* by another Comforter coming after Jesus in the person of the Holy Spirit (16:5-16), and *be peaceful* since their grief will turn to joy (16:17-33). Finally he prays for them (John 17).

John 14–17

• Us

### The Discourse ends with Jesus’ longest prayer in the gospels. Melanchthon says [read quote]. Here Jesus prays a threefold prayer for Himself, His disciples, and for all believers.

Philip

Quote

Widening

Circle

#### In verses 1-5 Christ prays for **Himself** that God would glorify Him in His completion of His mission through His vicarious death.

• Himself

#### In verses 6-19 Christ prays that His **disciples** might have God’s protection and sanctification while they remain in the world.

• Disciples

#### Today’s text in verses 20-26 concerns the last section of Christ’s prayer that relates to **us** as a part of *all believers*. But what did Jesus pray for us? What was most important to Jesus as he anticipated the cross?

Most

Important

• Why

Important?

### Today we will focus on the end of his prayer where he prays for our unity. But what does unity look like?

What is

Unity?

Prayer of

Jesus

#### Well, unity is not the same as *uniformity*. Many of us have worn uniforms at work, in the military, on sports teams, or some other team.

Uniformity

#### We are too painfully aware that just looking the same doesn’t mean unity!

### Rather than being uniform, Jesus prays for His church to be united—so much so that this was His final request of the Father before His crucifixion.

Unity

### But *why* is unity so important that Christ would make it His final prayer for the saints? (Subject). Today we will see *three reasons* Jesus gives for us to be united. Verses 20-23 tell us that first motivation for unity is because…

# I. Unity grows the church (20-23).

MP

#  [When believers get along with one another, the church increases.]

## Our model for unity is the first and second members of the Trinity (20-21a).

20-21a

(2 slides)

• 99%

(4 clicks)

### Can you imagine the Father and the Son arguing over roles and responsibilities?

Trinity

#### “Hey Father! I don’t like this idea of dying on a cross. Count me out. If you think it’s necessary, then you do it yourself!”

#### The Father replies, “No way!” and the Spirit agrees, adding, “And what this stuff about *me* having to give everyone *gifts*? What a hassle! I hate shopping!”

### In fact, “Trinity” really means “three-unity.” Three persons of the Godhead have differing roles but work together in complete unity.

• Three-

Unity

## Likewise, our unity shows the world that Christ is from God (21b-23).

21b-23

### In my NIV text verses 20-23 comprise 5 sentences, which makes it hard to tell where the emphasis is in this section. But actually, the Greek text has only 2 sentences—verses 20-21 and verses 22-23, both of which have as their final idea “that the world may believe” and “that the world may know.” The result of unity is evangelism!

### Some years back [1993], a British reporter asked a Catholic leader on the growth of evangelicals in the UK, “Are you concerned about this incredible growth among the evangelicals?” “No,” came the firm reply. “Why not?” the reporter pressed. “I’m not concerned that the evangelicals have growth to 17 million here,” the Catholic leader said. “I won’t be concerned—that is, unless they decide to unite.”

Catholic

Leader

### In contrast, where there is unity, the world believes—like verses 21b and 23b say.

Singapore

#### I think one reason the church in Singapore has grown in recent years is because it has learned something about unity despite race and language groups. Of the 4 major language groups in Singapore, 3 have been effectively reached: English, Mandarin, and Tamil.

#### Did you know that 99% of Hindus are Indian, 99% of Buddhists here are Chinese, 99% of Muslims are Malay? In contrast, only Christians have reached across ethnic lines with 79% Chinese, 8% Indian, a half percent Malay, and 13% other groups.

#### Sure, we have a way to go, but I can’t help but think that non-Christians have taken a more serious look at Christianity given the unity amidst diversity across racial and language lines.

MPI

Sub

(I said Christ addresses three reasons for unity in today’s text. We’ve already seen the first reason to be united—because unity grows the church. In verse 24 Christ provides the second reason to bring believers together…)

# II. We’ll be united in heaven forever—so let’s start agreeing now (24).

MPII

#  [We’ll be in glory together—so let’s show some of that glory now.]

## Christ prayed that true Christians would “be with me where I am.” What does He mean? He was right there, wasn’t He? And weren’t the disciples already there? Of course.

24

### Here we see Jesus using the present tense to refer to something actually future. He does the same thing in verse 11 which literally reads, “I am in the world no longer,” even though He was still there.

SBC

Schools

Title

### Christ is looking to the future with such certainty that He speaks of it in the present. The disciples hadn’t seen His glory yet, in that He was confined to a human body. But they *would* see it—they’d all see it together.

## I think the implication here is that since we’ll be united forever in heaven, this should show down here as well.

Heavenly

Directions

### Can you imagine in heaven trying to find your way around: “Let’s see, here we are in the Presbyterian precinct. But where’s Assemblies Avenue? Oh, OK, I see it here on the map—after Baptist Boulevard, Lutheran Lane, Reformed Road, Charismatic Crescent, and on the tip of Pentecostal Point!”

### No way! We’re all one family there. We’ll keep our same race—you’ll still be Chinese—but we won’t be separated by a denominational distinctive!

### One of the best tastes of earthly unity before heavenly bliss is Singapore Bible College. Once I was teaching at SBC on the Book of Job. As I shared how different cultures explained the reasons for suffering, I asked a Pakistani student to share how Pakistani Muslims explain pain, then I asked an Indian student, “How do Indians view suffering?” It suddenly occurred to me that our class not only had students from Pakistan and India, but also from Malaysia, Philippines, Myanmar, Korea, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Singapore—in *one* class! SBC has 500 students from 25 nations and 20 denominations and functions as a genuinely diverse but equally genuinely united fellowship.

SBC

Block 7

2 Cor 6

(4 slides)

(I should give one word of caution, however…)

## Genuine spiritual unity is possible only with genuine believers.

Church

Unity

### I believe 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 is instructive here. [Read]

### The WCC has over 250 Protestant, Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches—but does it have biblical unity? No, it has organizational, external unity—but no spiritual, internal unity in the biblical sense. In fact, at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993 the WCC encouraged its member denominations to open its arms to African shamans, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and witch doctors! Esch notes, 38

WCC

### Another leader correctly noted, “It is better to be divided by truth than to be united by error” (UNITY limitations on).

Subject

• Quote

### (Christ’s prayer up to this point highlighted two reasons He considered unity vital: because unity grows the church, and because we’re all going to see His glory in heaven together anyway. His final reason unity is important is very similar to the first…)

MPs

(2 slides)

# III. Unity shows love that attracts unbelievers (25-26).

MP

#  [United Christians draw others into the family through their love.]

25-26

## A young boy grew up in a family where his mother prayed regularly to various gods, attended the festivals, went to the temple regularly. However, his father was more philosophical. Once the boy asked his father who God was, and his dad took him outside, pointed to the sky and said, “There—that’s god. And beyond that is god too!” The mother’s ritualistic beliefs and father's philosophical musings caused many arguments between them—so much so that the boy decided to abandon their religion for Christianity because he saw love among believers. Lack of unity ruins one’s testimony!

Two Boys

## Another young boy grew up in a “free thinker” family. His mother and father divorced when he was four, his mother remarried, and his step father and mother fought continually. They too divorced, and a third marriage began that was equally traumatic.

### One day the boy visited a school friend’s house. The difference was amazing! No one threw things, the parents didn’t argue, the father was a spiritual leader in the home, they all prayed together, there was a genuine peace and unity which made this boy want to visit that home time and again. He did. He ended up going to church with the family and soon accepted Christ. He even became a missionary for 28 years. And he’s speaking to you right now.

### I have seen what Christian unity can do in my own life. I’ve also seen the devastating effects of disunity over the simplest issue.

• Rick

# Conclusion

### So why is unity so important? Here is the key idea of what Jesus said: **Christian unity is evangelistic** (MI). When believers stick together, non-believers want to stick with them. Jesus said people that will come to Christ when they see that believers can get along.

Subject

Gandhi

Main

Idea

### Unbelievers are also repulsed by disunity. Mahatma Gandhi was tremendously drawn to Jesus Christ and His teachings, but after seeing how Christians treated each other he said, “I would become a Christian—if it weren’t for Christians.”

Philip

Quote

• if not…

• I would…

### The great reformer, Philip Melanchthon, put it this way:

 “In essentials, unity;

 In non-essentials, liberty;

 In all things, charity.”

### [Redwood sequoias are united—J. Carl Laney, *Marching Orders*, 156, emphasis his]

#### I grew up in Northern California with great redwood sequoia forests, the largest trees in the world. One scholar notes of them, “Redwoods are noted for age, beauty, and fine wood. But one unusual characteristic of the redwoods is their tendency toward *unity*. Two redwoods may grow up together several feet apart, and then after 50 or 100 years the trees begin to touch. Quite often the bark begins to overlap and fill out so that the two trees ultimately become one! There are cases where a dozen trees have sprung up from the outer roots of a tree that has fallen and have formed a perfect circle. After several centuries these trees have grown together so that outwardly they appear as a single giant tree!”

Looking

Up

Tree

Trunks

2 Trees

Redwood

#### “In keeping with Christ’s prayer, the goal of the body of Christ should be to grow into such a unity that the world will recognize us as one. The display of such unity in our individualistic society will be a testimony to the world of the divine Person and work of Christ.”

### Can we bow together and take some time for reflection and prayer?

Prayer

#### Do non-Christians hear you share about conflicts between believers? How have they responded? Are you surprised?

#### Are you a team player with all other believers—or at odds with someone? Are you willing to deal with this so Satan cannot use it for his advantage?

#### Does Jesus’ death for all people really unite you with other believers? Do you bring people together or divide them?

### Prayer

Preliminary Questions

I asked these questions as part of Step 2 in the sermon preparation process (cf. Homiletics notes, 24)

Verses Questions

Context What did the author record just prior to this passage?

Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible?

Background What historical context helps us understand this passge?

20 Who else has He prayed for before this verse?

 What does Christ pray for future believers?

21 What does it mean for believers to be “one”?

 Are believers one now? (Has God already answered Jesus’ prayer?)

 If Christians are one now, then why all the divided churches, denominations, etc.?

 How is Christ in the Father and the Father in Christ?

 How are believers “be in Christ and the Father”?

 If we are genuinely “in Christ and the Father” will the world always believe?

22 How do we as believers have this glory from Christ?

 Does this glory always result in unity?

23 What does “I in them and you in me” mean?

 Does “may they be brought to complete unity” imply that we don’t have it yet?

 Again, will unity result in conversions?

24 Does Jesus express doubt that Christians will go to heaven?

 Where was Jesus? Earth? Heaven? A state of mind?

 Where does He want us to be with Him?

 Why does Jesus want believers to see His glory? When will this happen?

 How does God’s love for Christ relate to God’s giving Him glory?

25 Does Jesus mean that non-believers (the world) really know that God sent Jesus?

26 Who is the “them”? the world? believers?

 How does Christ make the Father known?

Non-textual Questions on Unity

1 What is unity?

2 How does unity of believers relate to the many denominations?

3 Do Christians already have unity but simply do not claim it or live it?

4 What is the common foundation of unity?

5 Can unity exist between spiritual and carnal (non-Spirit led) Christians?

6 How does unity relate to a biblical view of separation (2 Cor. 6:14-18)?

Tentative Subject/Complement Statements

### Are you a “scissors Christian”—or a “glue Christian”?

#### The “scissors Christian” is the one who divides. He’s sharp and able to make clear distinctions with a fine edge. Making very distinct boundaries is important to him. He tends to be more task-oriented than relationship-oriented.

#### In contrast, the “glue Christian” is one who brings together. Some say he’s tacky—he gets into sticky situations by building relationships with people who are unlike one another. The glue Christian so melts various people that, while each maintains his uniqueness, they together contribute towards the whole.

### In 1984 our Californian church split the month after my wife and I were married.

#### Pastor Sloan preached from the KJV for 23 years, but then the new pastor Emmons preached from the NASB

#### So a petition was passed around with 200 names to oust Emmons—even at the local barbershop!

#### This church of 1400 split: 200 began another Baptist church, 600 stayed, and 600 fell through the cracks.

#### Decline followed, and non-Christians said to newcomers, “Whatever you do, stay away from the big yellow church downtown!”

Subjunctive: Believers *should be* united so the world will believe Christ is God.

Present: Christians *are* united in Christ just as the Trinity is united.

Since “unity” is such an overused term, I need another more “catchy” designation. Samples:

Being a team player

Others-sensitive

Doing your own thing

Maverick vs.

Non-divisive

Peacemaking

Glue in the family vs. scissors in the family

Illustrations:

Unity with a believer whom you have never met (personal experience/imagination)

Unity throughout the generations despite nationality, race, denomination, etc. (Tenney, 249)

Redwood sequoias forming a huge circle (Laney, 155-56)

WCC (Laney, 154)

Orchestra (Laney, 158-59)

Unity

John 17:20-26

Exegetical Outline

Prologue: Christ has finished teaching the disciples in the Upper Room Discourse and then prays a threefold prayer for Himself, His disciples, and for all belivers.

I. (1-5) Christ prays for Himself that God would glorify Him in His completion of His mission through His vicarious death.

II. (6-19) Christ prays that His disciples might have God’s protection and sanctification while they remain in the world.

Today’s text in verses 20-26 concerns the last section of Christ’s prayer which relates to all believers.

Exegetical Idea:

I. (20-23) The purpose Christ prayed for all Christians to be united was so that they might have fellowship with God and a witness to the world.

A. (20-21a) The content of Christ’s prayer was unity among believers of all ages just like the unity of the Godhead.

B. (21b-23) The purpose of unity was so that Christians could experience both fellowship with God and witnessing among men.

II. (24) The content of Christ’s prayer was for believers to be united with Him eternally in glory.

A. (

III. (25-26) The purpose that Christ makes the Father’s love known to the world [through united saints] is so that the world may come to know God.

A. (

**Homiletical Exposition** (cyclical inductive form)

Introduce Subject: Why is unity so important that Christ would make it His final prayer for the saints?

I. Unity produces more believers who can fellowship with God (20-23).

A.

II. We’ll be united in heaven forever—so we might as well agree now (24).

A.

III. Unity shows God’s love to unbelievers so they can know Him (25-26).

A.

Main Idea: Christian unity is evangelistic.

# Study Questions (Step 1)

# Context: What did the author record just prior to this passage?

# Purpose: Why is this passage in the Bible?

# Background: What historical context helps us understand this passage?

# Questions

Outlines (Steps 2-5)

Title

Passage

Exegetical Outline (Steps 2-3)

# Exegetical Idea (CPT):

# I.

# II.

# III.

Purpose or Desired Listener Response (Step 4)

The listeners will

**Sermon Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)—Steps 5-6

# Subject:

# Introduction

### Interest:

### Need:

### Subject or CPS:

### Background:

### Text:

### Preview:

### Transition:

# I.

# II.

# III.

# Conclusion

###  (MI/CPS).

### Main Points

### Exhortation/Application

# Discussion Questions:

# Tentative Theme/Thrust Statements (Step 5)

Text

# Possible Illustrations (Step 6)

### Text

# Possible Applications (Step 6)

### Text