
Jesus Praying for Us

John 17:20-26

Russ Kennedy

Christians love to think and talk about a couple of things we want to think about today.

Christians love to talk about prayer. Prayer is something we think of as important. We gladly share and listen to prayer requests. I suspect we pray very little.

Christians love to talk about unity.

Too often we think that because we talk about a subject we experience the reality of that subject. We talk about prayer and feel like we pray. We talk about unity and feel like we are one. Our text this morning will help us to think about what it means to pray and be one as a people who believe in Christ.

We will see this in this last paragraph of Jesus' prayer. What has Jesus been praying for?

Jesus and His Father – primarily about His glory.

Jesus and His disciples – primarily about our safety.

Jesus and Us...

This prayer looks forward and anticipates all of those, including us who will believe.

In the first sentence, he includes us in the petition of verses 6-19.

Jesus moves in this part of His prayer to intercede directly for us.

To Express the Unity from the Father**(v. 20-21)**

Jesus prays that we will express our existing spiritual unity.

²⁰ “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, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Because there is so much misunderstanding about Christian unity I am going pause and parse these sentences a bit closely.

Not to create a false unity

Jesus is not praying that we will create some false unity. We are not seeking create unity. He is praying that we will recognize the unity that truly exists. Christians do not create unity. They cannot declare oneness. They cannot fabricate it. We are called to see, savor and share the unity only God can create.

What is the source and substance of our true unity? It is that we believe in the Word. This is what Jesus prays for. He prays for those who like the disciples believe the Word. Those who believe the Word are one. Their oneness comes from being united to Christ and thus, being united to one another. This is not something we strive for; it is something we recognize.

There is a spiritual union that causes belief and belief recognizes. That union is life. That union is being in the Father and Christ in us by the Spirit. The union is among all who are truly born from above and believe the Word and bow to Christ.

Not to be one with the world

Expressing the Christian unity Jesus is praying for means that we are not one with the world. Again, it is not a “should” or an “ought” – it is not that we ought to stop being one with the world. It is not that we are warned against it. We are not one with the world. We have been set apart from the world through the Word. Now we are to act like who we are.

May we realize that we not one with the world.

To recognize all true believers

Expressing the Christian unity Jesus is praying for means that we are to recognize all true believers. We do have a true union with all those who truly believe. This was the great sin of the church at Corinth. At the Lord’s Table they did not recognize even the rest of the true believers who were in their own church. They did not wait for them to arrive so that the sharing was with all (see 1 Corinthians 11).

May we recognize all those who truly believe the Word.

To receive all true believers

Expressing the Christian unity Jesus is praying for means that we are to receive all true believers. This is often a real challenge for us. We are to receive true believers even when they are very different. They may dress different. They may talk different. They may have different music. They may have different concerns and backgrounds and

ways. They may speak a different language. Receiving all those who believe is the fruit of outreach and mission.

May we receive all those who truly believe the Word.

To rejoice in all true believers

Expressing the Christian unity Jesus is praying for means that we are to rejoice in all true believers. I say this because our author of this text, the apostle John, will live out what Jesus prays. In one of his letters written many years later, he would say this, *“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”* [1 John 1:3-4]

Do you see it? The ultimate end of Jesus’ praying is that our fellowship will be filled with the fullness of joy. So our union and communion with God will be expressed in the joy of union and communion with one another.

May we rejoice in all those who truly believe the Word.

To Extoll the Glory Given by the Father (v. 22-24)

Jesus prays that we might extoll the glory and love of the Father.

²² 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, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

I confess that I can only say what this says. The wonder, the reality is beyond my comprehension. But we will one day experience the fulfillment of what Jesus speaks of here.

To Share in the Lord’s Glory (v. 22-23)

Reflecting the opening of the prayer in verses 1-2, Jesus asks that we might together share in the Lord’s glory. Jesus prays this and gives this in order that we might be one. So the glory shared between the Father and the Son is essential to the unity of the Godhead. Thus, sharing in that glory is essential for our unity as well.

To See the Lord’s Glory (v. 24-26)

Jesus desires that we might see His glory. Here is the eschatological, the future aspect of this prayer and this fulfillment. There is a unity here on earth that comes from the glory of the future. That union is an in-breaking of future glory into the mess of our present world, time and space. But that glory can only dimly be experienced and extolled now. There will be a day when we will see that glory. When we see it we will see the love of the Father for the Son.

This magnificent future reality is for the elect. It is for the ones who have been given to Jesus by the Father. It was His divine choice in eternity past to select out a people and to give them to Jesus. One of the implications here that is fleshed out in the Apostle Paul’s

writings is that this choice and gift of a redeemed people is an act of love by the Father for the Son. It as though one of the greatest ways the Father could show love to Jesus was to present to Him a people, a bride, a city. So, Jesus prays that those people will be with Him in heaven *so that* they may see the Lord's glory and thus the Father's love.

Maybe it is like this. The love of the Father for the Son is so bright, weighty and precious that it flows as a glorious fire between them. When we stand before the Father and see the Son's glory we will point to river of glory flowing between them exclaim to one another, "Behold, the love of the Father."

We will look at one another and see a reflected, but radiant glory as well. And we will say to one another, "I love you with the love of Christ" and the Spirit will flow between us in a bright river of words and wonders.

To Know the Love Bestowed by the Father (v. 25-26)

Jesus' final petition then is that we will know the love bestowed up on Jesus and us by the Father.

²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."

Because of Jesus' Knowing the Father (v. 25)

In His prayer, Jesus grounds His request in that He knows the Father. This is not like knowing a fact, a truth, a data. This is an intimate knowing in a relationship. The world does not have this kind of relationship with the Father. They may know of God, but they do know Him. To really know God, we must know Him as righteous.

Unlike the world, Jesus celebrates and relishes the righteousness of God. And so do those who have been given to Jesus. They know in a believing way that the Father sent Jesus. Here John is picking up on his theme and purpose again. Saving belief agrees with all that the Father says about Jesus. So to follow Jesus you have to believe that He is the one and only sent one from the Father.

To Experience the Father's Love (v. 26)

In His prayer, Jesus aims His request for us to experience the Father's love. Thorough Jesus we know the Father's name. We know His character. Knowing His character, we can enter into the love that flows between the Father and the Son.

How is this request answered? It is answered in the giving of the Holy Spirit. In this section of John, the sending of the Holy Spirit has been a prominent feature. Jesus has talked about that being an expression of the Father's love. Paul writing in Romans 5:3-5, picks up on this. He shows how the giving of the Spirit is in the context our growing in Christ-like character while experiencing the love of God through the person of the Spirit. Listen to what he writes:

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put

us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

What sweet nectar for those who have been chosen, loved, and prayed for by Christ – that we would share and see the glory of God. We will see dimly beginning now. And we will see it in fullness one grand day in the future.

Reflect and Respond

Sometimes, a text is about what we must do. There is a distinct call to general or particular obedience. Sometimes, a text is about what we must believe. As we reflect on Jesus' prayer and respond to it, may we believe, trust, agree, confess and live what is here.

That Christians are truly one:

Our union is what God does, not what we create. God makes all those who He has loved, chosen and saved into one.

Our union is both experienced and expressed. We are to recognize, receive and rejoice in all who are truly believers.

Our union is discriminating. We are to not be one with the world. Not everyone claiming faith has saving faith. That is the core theme of the book of John. The standard for union is belief in Christ and the Word.

Our union is evangelistic. When Christians truly love one another, there is a gospel affect on the world. They see the love of God and His triune greatness reflected in us.

That we rejoice in the glory and love of God:

Because of the glory shared among the Godhead, we will share in glory as well.

Because of the glory displayed by the Godhead, we will see that glory some day.

From this message comes two distinct calls:

To the world, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe all that the Bible tells us. You will know the Lord and experience His love when you have believed.

To the Christian, pray as Jesus has prayed. Pray the same requests. Pray for the same reasons. Pray hoping in the same results.

