



**SCRIPTURE:**

John 17:20-26

**SERMON:**

I accepted the call to become the lead pastor at Blue Ridge Christian Church on November 25th 2012. 46 people voted yes. 2 abstained. And one 1 voted no for me to be next pastor of the church. I never did find out who that one no vote was.

To say that I was surprised to have an almost unanimous vote for me to be pastor would be an understatement. To put it mildly, Blue Ridge was a dysfunctional church. During the interview process I was told by several people that I shouldn't take the job. One of them was the current pastor. I called him one night and said, "Dennis, I am applying for your job. Could you give me any advice?" He said, "Yeah...I don't recommend anyone pastor that church." Even the church board warned me about the church struggling. During one of our initial meetings, one of the elders said, "Brandon, we have a lot of problems. Are you sure you want to be our pastor?"

Once I started the work, I can honestly say the Lord let me know what I was getting into. The church was divided. The congregation didn't trust the church board. The church board was hurt and tired. And the church had little to no direction. There were power struggles, divisions and fighting.

Which meant my job was to work towards unifying the congregation. The question is how do you do that? How do you unify a group of divided believers? The answer is in our text.

Jesus' prayer is that believers would be One just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One in the Trinity. So then, church unity is rooted in and built upon the unity of God Himself and our union with Him in Christ.

To state it plainly, the church must unite around the gospel.

Here's why this is important for us this morning. We're a rapidly growing congregation. We had over 2500 people here last week. That's great, but how do we keep a group like that unified as one man with one shared purpose and vision? I can tell you this: it's not

going to be around our backgrounds, or shared experiences, our ethnicities, or interests. We're too diverse. We're too different from one another. Our church can only be unified if we unite around one thing and that's the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That is Jesus' prayer for His church, and that is the subject of this last section in John 17.

This chapter is part of the Upper Room discourse. This is the night before Jesus died. Jesus's disciples arranged for them to eat the Passover meal in a private room. That's where Jesus washed their feet and exposed Judas as a traitor. He's been teaching and revealing much truth.

But in John 17, Jesus switches from teaching to prayer. This prayer is broken into three sections. In verses 1-5, Jesus prays about the mission and glory of the Father and Son. In verses 6-19, Jesus focuses His prayer on the 11 disciples. And now in the remainder of the chapter, Jesus prays for all believers.

Two Sections

- The Purpose of Church Unity (VS20-23)
- The Essence of Church Unity (VS24-26)

### **The Purpose of Church Unity (VS20-23)**

#### **Purpose #1-Church Unity Testifies to the Gospel (VS20-21, 25)**

**V20 -- *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."***

In verse 9, Jesus said He is not praying for the world but for the 11 disciples in the room. Now, He says, I am not praying just for the 11 disciples, but for all those who will believe in me through their word. In other words, Jesus is now praying for all future believers, throughout all time, who will come to faith as a result of believing the apostle's message.

The Apostles had a huge ripple effect. After Jesus was raised and ascended into Heaven, the apostles were sent into all the world preaching the gospel. They also wrote the New Testament. And every person who has ever believed, including you and me, either believed the direct message from the apostles or the doctrine they recorded in the New Testament. Our salvation is built on the apostle's doctrine as given to them by Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur said, *“Though the vast majority had not yet been born, they nevertheless were and had been for eternity on the heart of the Savior.”*

Jesus is praying for the faith and salvation of all believers. To what end, though? Why is Jesus praying for future believers? Two reasons.

## **#1-Unity**

**V21 -- *“that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.”***

“Father I am praying, not just for the 11 in front of me, but for all your people who will come to faith as a result of their message, and my prayer for them is that they would be one just you and I are one. Father, you are in Me, and I and in You, and I want them to be in us.” Jesus’ prayer is that we would experience profound unity and intimacy with God and one another.

In the past three weeks, we’ve experienced two mass shootings in our country—one in Nashville and last week in Louisville. We kill each other because we’re alienated from God and one another. We talk a lot about man’s alienation from God, but we don’t talk hardly at our alienation from one another. After Adam and Eve sinned, not only were they cast out of God’s presence, people began to turn on one another. Cain killed Abel.

So, Jesus’ prayer is to reverse the effects of the fall in His people. In Christ, we are reconciled to God and fellow believers. We are united to the Son and the Father by the Spirit and through that union we are united to one another.

This is why Jesus said in John 15, Jesus said I am the Vine. You are the branches. We are united to Christ, but the branches are also united to one another. His life flows in us and to one another.

This is why Church membership is so vital. It’s crucial that we worship on Sunday with the local church. But we must also take that next step and become members of a local church, because church membership is how we practically demonstrate our union with Christ and other believers.

Just as baptism demonstrates our new life in Christ, church membership demonstrates that we have been baptized into the body of Christ and have experienced this profound unity Jesus speaks of in His prayer in John 17.

This unity is not an end in itself. It has a purpose.

## **#2-Evangelism**

**V21 -- “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.”**

The unity of the church promotes a Christian witness to the world. When the church is unified, the world is exposed to the gospel.

How?

The world sees a compelling community. When an unbeliever is confronted with a unified group of Christ followers, the gospel becomes clear. DA Carson said, *“This display of unity is compelling, so un-worldly, that their witness as to who Jesus is becomes explainable only if Jesus truly is the revealer whom the Father has sent.”*—in other words, Christian unity is so profound that the only explanation for it is that Jesus Christ is who He said He was.

This is how unbelievers come to know Christ—through the church. At my last church, we began discipling a man named Roger. Roger came into the recovery home we were associated with. He didn’t know anything about Christ or the Bible. He was a drunk off the streets. But Roger got plugged into the church. He started worshiping with us on Sundays. He went to multiple Bible studies. People had him in their homes. He built numerous relationships. During that time, Roger kept experiencing two things. He heard the gospel and Christians loved him. Eventually, Roger trusted Christ and was baptized. He’s still in the church today. And it’s because God used a unified group of gospel believing Christians to witness to Him. Just as Jesus prayed.

This is why our work in replanting is so important. A dying church is not a unified witness for the gospel. A church that can barely keep the lights on doesn’t tell the truth about Jesus and the power of the gospel. This is why we’re putting Christians on teams to train and be sent. We need to replant dying churches.

## **Point #2-Church Unity Testifies to the Love of God (VS22-23, 26)**

***VS22 -- The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one***

Jesus says the Father has given Him glory and Jesus has given the glory He's received from God to us. What's He talking about?

The glory of Jesus is inherent to His nature as God's eternal Son. That is to say, the Son's eternal glory belongs to Him and was not given to Him by anyone. It's His because He's the divine Son of God. But the Father did give the Son glory in the incarnation. During His earthly ministry, Jesus does receive glory from the Father. How so? By manifesting the excellencies and characteristics of the Father. Jesus is the perfect image and representation of God Himself, and in this way, He shared in the glory of the Father. And now Jesus shares that glory with His followers.

And this is another aspect of our unity. We're not only unified around the truth of gospel, but in our common manifestation of Christ's character among us. The Spirit indwells every believer and in doing so, He bears fruit, which exemplify the character of Christ.

We have to stop and appreciate how incredible it is that God would allow us to share in His glory. Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols." Isaiah 48:11, "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another." I will admit, these texts speak of God not sharing His praise with idols. And I am in no way suggesting, we share in the praises of God. But I do want you to notice how serious God takes His glory; and in Christ He shares some of that glory with us!

That's because God loves His people.

***VS23 -- "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."***

This is one of the most incredible statements in the entire Bible. To state it plainly, if you're a Christian, God the Father loves you just as much as He loves His Son, Jesus Christ. Let that sink in for a minute. Christian, God loves you as much as He loves Jesus Christ.

That's what the verse says! Look at it again. **Verse 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."** Church unity is for the purpose of the world knowing that God loves believers just as He loves Jesus.

No wonder Paul was so confident of God's love. In Romans 8:35, he confidently asks, *35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Paul knew the love of God, and he wanted fellow believers to know the depth of God's love as well. In Ephesians 3:18-19, Paul prays believers would have the "strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

The church's unity shows the love of God to the lost world. And friends, I hope you agree, our world needs the love of God. They need to see and experience the love of God.

## **The Substance of Church Unity (VS24-26)**

### **#1-Enjoying Christ (VS24)**

**VS24 -- "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."**

One day our unity with God in Christ will be perfectly complete. Jesus' prayer is that we will be with Him and the Father in Heaven to enjoy His glory for all eternity. On the basis of the Father's love for Him, Jesus wants us to see and savor His glory forever.

Why? Because, as John Piper, famously says, *"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."* Jesus' prayer for us to see His glory is a prayer for Him to be supremely glorified, because when His people see and enjoy Christ's glory in Heaven, Jesus is exalted.

You don't have to wait until Heaven to enjoy His glory. You can and should enjoy Him now. The apostles saw His glory while on earth. John 1:14, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* They saw His glory as they watched Him every day. They witnessed and enjoyed His glory by faith.

We are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. But the faith that saves, enjoys. Saving faith cannot be stripped down to simply mean believing bare facts about Jesus. Saving faith sees Jesus as our all-satisfying treasure. We have a glimpse of Heaven now as a see and savor of Jesus Christ.

This is a major aspect of the church's unity. Christians are people who love and enjoy their Savior. We were once blind to this glory. 2nd Corinthians 4:4, *"The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."* We can see. And what is it we see? The gospel (good news) of the glory of Christ.

## **#2-Knowing Christ (VS25)**

***VS25 -- O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.***

Jesus addresses God as a righteous Father. God is the standard of truth and righteousness. Which is why the world doesn't know Him. They are not of the truth. But in Christ, we have been made to know the righteous God. We are people of truth and we know the God of truth and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

This is relational knowledge. This is what Jesus meant in John 17:3, *"3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."* Christians enjoy God because they know God.

***Jeremiah 9:23-24 - 23 Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."***

### **#3-Loving Christ (VS26)**

***VS26 -- 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.***

Jesus revealed the name of God to the disciples; meaning, He revealed God to them. The name of God refers to the fullness and essence of who God is. Jesus revealed the Father to His people. And because God is inexhaustible, Jesus will continue to make known the name of God to His people.

For what purpose? *“that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”* Knowledge of God leads to more love for God. The more you know God, the more you will love God. This is one reason God wants you to get to know Him. He wants you to enjoy Him and He wants you to love Him.

This may sound self-serving. “I want you to love me and I want you to enjoy me.” You might have had (or currently have) a boyfriend or girlfriend who demanded such attention. It’s not attractive, because it’s self-centered. But with God, He’s seeking our highest good. When we enjoy, know and love God, we find our highest point of satisfaction, peace and fulfillment. There is no greater purpose in this life than knowing and loving God.

And the church is a transformed community of believers who are unified around these truths. This is what makes us one. We are God’s people who enjoy, know and love Christ.

### **Application**

Here’s how I want to close. Paul says in Ephesians 4:3 that Christians should be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

How can we work towards the unity that Christ prays for? Let me share with you five things.

### **#1-Unify around biblical truth**

There are many ecumenical groups that love John 17. Ecumenical groups love to talk about unity and will often say we must set aside our doctrinal differences for the sake of unity.



Back in Indiana we had Lenten services—4-5 Sundays leading up to Easter. A group of pastors got together and we planned services at one another's churches and swapped pulpits. One year someone invited the Catholic church to join, and I pushed back against that. I didn't want to give the impression that we believed the same gospel because we don't. The lead pastor in charge of all the planning insisted I set aside my doctrinal differences for the sake of unity. I said, George there is no unity if we can't agree on the gospel.

Jesus doesn't want us to pursue unity at any cost. He wants us to pursue unity in the truth.

## **#2-Take practical steps to cultivate unity**

Consider others better than yourself

***Philippians 2:1-3 - 1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.***

Kill gossip

Nothing will tear apart the unity of the church faster than gossip. Gossip isn't simply talking about other people. It's not necessarily sinful to talk about someone else. Gossip is talking about things that you're not sure are true or not. Gossip is also saying things about people that you wouldn't say to their face. Gossip will kill a church. It's like poisoning a well that everyone drinks from. The devil loves gossip. Christians, you need to kill it.

Believe the Best About Others

I know this is really hard because we like to connect the dots when we don't have all the information. "He didn't return my text message right away. He must be mad at me." "I saw John talking with another woman. He must be having an affair." Christians we should seek to believe the best about one another. Maybe this is what Paul meant when he said,

“Love believes all things.” Love isn’t gullible or naïve. But it does believe the best until proven otherwise.

### Check your Motives

Why do you want to serve in that position? Why do you feel the need to be in the inner circle? The church can become a breeding ground for ill-motives. People want to rise to leadership for the sake of power. Christians, we need to be selfless. Church unity depends on it. Nothing will destroy unity faster than believers who are seeking control and power.

### Forgive those who wrong you

This is what makes the church a compelling community to the lost world. Christians are other-worldly. We actually forgive people when they harm us. Church unity is preserved when we don’t feel the need to get our pound of flesh. Instead we forgive just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

### **#3-Use your gifts to build up the body**

**1 Peter 4:10, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another”**

**1 Corinthians 12:7, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”**

God has given every believer a spiritual gift to serve the body of Christ for the common good. We are commanded to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ.

For our Arise campaign, we’re seeking 100% participation. So far, we have 50%. As pastor Erik said in the beginning, even if someone wrote a check for the entire bill, we would still want everyone to be involved to some degree.

We have anywhere from 1500-2000 people here every Sunday. 500 serve regularly. Imagine what our church would look like if everyone contributed.

### **#4-Get baptized**

What does this have to do with church unity? Everything. There is no church unity without baptism. The church is unified around the gospel, and if you haven't been baptized, you have not identified with Christ nor have you expressed your belief in the gospel.

## **#5-Join the Church**

Jesus prayed for the unity of the universal church. That's the church all over the world and throughout all time. Believers are a part of the body of Christ spiritually. But we show our spiritual union with Christ's people by joining a biblical church.

Some may say, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. That's true. You also don't have to go home each night to stay married, but I recommend it.

### **REVIEW:**

- ❖ Who is Jesus praying for in verse 20?
- ❖ How does our unity, our oneness with Christ show the world that God sent Him?
- ❖ What is the glory that Jesus is speaking of in verse 22?
- ❖ What promise do we see in verse 24?
- ❖ How does Jesus continue to make the name of Father known (Verse 26)?

### **REFLECT:**

- ❖ What is the basis for true Christian unity?
- ❖ Why is being a part of a church body required to have this kind of unity?
- ❖ How does TJC reflect this kind of unity?

### **RESPOND:**

- ❖ What can you personally do to promote this kind of unity?

### **MEDITATE:**

- ❖ John 17:20-21 - 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.*

### **MEMORIZE:**

- ❖ John 17:24 - 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.*

### **PRAYER FOCUS:**

- ❖ Kids Director - **Laurie DiCicco**
- ❖ Ministries - Kids Ministry - more leaders and helpers

- ❖ NAMB Church Planter - **Steven Chang** - Philadelphia, PA - Gracepoint Philadelphia at Drexel
- ❖ Unreached People Group (UPG): Mountain Jew in Azerbaijan
- ❖ Population in country: 15,000
- ❖ Global population: 103,600
- ❖ Christian: 0.0%
- ❖ Evangelical: 0.0%
- ❖ Primary Religion: Ethnic Religion
- ❖ Primary Language: Judeo-Tat