

## John 17:20-26

<sup>20</sup>“I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message. <sup>21</sup>May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them, and you in me. May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

<sup>24</sup>“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see my glory—the glory you gave me, because you loved me before the world’s foundation. <sup>25</sup>Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you, and these men knew that you sent me. <sup>26</sup>I made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have for me may be in them, and that I may be in them.”

## Unity

### I.

In the beginning there was unity.

I’m sure modern culture can come up with all kinds of definitions of the word “unity,” but it is the unity between human beings and God that is the most important. God established it. God designed it. The God of all things, both visible and invisible, created human beings in his image. The concept of the image of God does not mean that people *look* like God—God is spirit and had no need for a physical body. Rather than a particular *look*, the image of God refers to perfection. Adam and Eve were created as perfect beings—they had a perfect knowledge of God and his will—they had a desire to *do* God’s will and continue in the unity established by God.

We know for a certainty that unity between God and human beings existed because when he finished creating all there is, including the human race: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31, EHV).

In the beginning there was unity. Unity was created by God.

After creation, God must have visited with Adam and Eve in the evenings, walking around in the Garden of Eden.

One day, not too long after they had been created, Adam and Eve were visited by Satan in the form of a snake. Satan deceived Eve. Rather than stop her and prevent disaster, Adam willingly permitted Eve to do something he *knew* was wrong.

“They heard the voice of the LORD God, who was walking around in the garden during the cooler part of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8, EHV). Unity was shattered. Adam still had a modicum of understanding of God’s will, but now he knew he had broken God’s will—he was no longer in perfect unity—the image of God had been shattered along with the unity.

God explained to the pair the consequences of their sin. Work would no longer be universally enjoyable, but would often be difficult. Pain and sorrow and loss would be regular visitors. Injury and illness would mar their lives. Creation itself would feel the effects of the sin—violent weather, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters were part of the consequences of breaking the unity.

### II.

We have no concept of the joy we would experience if *we* were so blessed as to walk in the Garden with God during the cooler part of the day. Sin separates from God. That is the most serious consequence of broken unity.

It’s tempting to look back on our first parents with disdain, pointing the accusing finger, and say that the separation from God we experience is all their fault. I guess that’s human nature, for

that's what the two of them immediately did—point fingers of blame anywhere but themselves. Adam pointed to Eve and said that sin was *her* fault; Eve pointed at the serpent and said it was *Satan's* fault that she sinned.

It might be human nature to point the finger of blame at someone else, but the reality is every one of us continues to willingly walk in the same path of sin and disunity with God. We can't help it. Sin has become an integral part of the human nature—so woven into the fabric of our existence that we cannot escape it.

The Bible compares sin with yeast. Part of the Passover celebration was the preparation time when the Jewish family would work hard to get all the crumbs of bread out of the house. They were to get out the leaven—the yeast. Sin is just as impossible for us to completely eradicate from our lives as getting the yeast out of a batch of dough that has been mixed. Sin has been mixed into our existence. Sin is impossible to get rid of.

It has been said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. You can *intend* to remove the leaven of your sin. You can *try* to stop using God's Name incorrectly. Perhaps you work really hard to not have hateful thoughts that are just as evil in God's eyes as murder. Though you may never slip something from the self to your pocket or purse to try to take them out of the store without paying, you certainly have coveted things that don't belong to you, or have envied the abilities or possessions of someone else.

It isn't just the *inherited* sin that has been passed down from Adam and Eve through every subsequent generation, your *actual* sins also separate you from God. Both your inherited and your actual sin breaks your unity.

### III.

That is the background into which Jesus came. Even from before creation, God knew that human beings would shatter the unity. From before creation God made his plans to restore unity.

The gospel before us today is part of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. After Judas had left the group to perform his dastardly deed of deception and betrayal, Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father as our great High Priest. In the part of his prayer that came before today's gospel, Jesus prayed especially for the remaining disciples. He knew he was going to suffer and die and that he would no longer be with them in the same way he had been for the previous three years. He asked that God would protect them and preserve their faith. He asked that God would help them to continue to spread the news of what Jesus was about to do.

Jesus is the embodiment of the image of God. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, but lost that image in the fall into sin. Remember the image of God is perfection and a perfect knowledge of God's will, and a perfect desire to carry it out. Jesus brought the image of God into human flesh once again. Not only was he born without inherited sin, Jesus did not sin, even once, in his life.

God's plan to restore unity meant that his One and only Son would have to take on his shoulders all the disunity the world had ever known and pay the full price of hell for every one of those sins—the seemingly minor ones, as well as those that appear major. Jesus carried the load of the world's sins to the cross. He suffered there, and died.

Though Jesus prayed this High Priestly Prayer *before* the final stage of his journey to the cross, we know the glorious resurrection story. Though Jesus suffered and died, he *had indeed* completed God's plan in full. He rose again from the dead.

Jesus knew all this would be fulfilled even before he had completed the task. His prayer in this gospel looks into the future. We see clearly that the Lord Jesus was thinking of you and me even before he went to the cross. "I am praying not only for them, but also for those who believe in me through their message" (John 17:20, EHV).

Jesus knew about every one of your sins. The heavy load of the sins of the past was increased by the load of sins he knew would be committed by those of future days. He did not shrink from that load, but willingly took it, also. He was thinking of you. He was thinking of me. He was

willingly taking our load, too.

The One who carried the load also has the power to send the Holy Spirit so that we would believe in the message of salvation he has won. “I am praying for those who believe in me through their message.”

His prayer continues and his message continues. You and I are the recipients of the message recorded by his early followers in the Bible. We are among those to whom he has entrusted the message for *this* generation. He prays even for those who yet will believe because we carry that message to others. Though we are nothing but clay pots, Jesus gives us the privilege of being those who continue this message in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to keep on bringing the unity he established to the world.

#### IV.

“May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you. May they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21, EHV).

Jesus has given us back true unity. We are one with our Heavenly Father because Jesus has destroyed the sin that destroyed our unity with God.

“May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:23, EHV). Disunity in the church flies in the face of God’s gracious will and Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer. Well-meaning Christians hear this part of Jesus’ prayer and try to create an artificial unity. They believe that Christians of all denominational stripes should get together and declare unity, regardless of doctrinal differences in our teachings. They are being deceived, just as Eve was deceived. Jesus does not pray for a false or superficial unity. Those who hold to false teachings break the unity God’s Word establishes.

Since there will always be those who stray from the clear teachings of God’s Word, we will never be able to bring about perfect unity in the visible church. Instead, we start with our personal relationships within our families and our congregations. Work to show the world the unity that God has established in Christ Jesus.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may see my glory—the glory you gave me, because you loved me before the world’s foundation” (John 17:24, EHV). From eternity God knew that Adam and Eve would destroy unity and would have to be evicted from the Garden of Eden, so they would not eat from the Tree of Life and thus live forever in this world of sin. From eternity God established his plan to give fallen humanity a way to come home.

Jesus knew he would soon face the suffering necessary to accomplish glory. He knew that even though he was God himself, he would endure the most tortuous agony the world could ever possibly know as God the Heavenly Father abandoned him to suffer the sins of the world. Even as he waited to experience that unspeakable torture, Jesus was thinking of you and me. He wanted us to experience the eternal glory of heaven. *That* is what he prayed for—that you and I would see him in glory everlasting—that we would *share* in his glory there with the Heavenly Father.

In the beginning there was unity. Though mankind destroyed it, Jesus reestablished unity. Because he did *everything* necessary for our unity, we will know glorious unity with the Heavenly Father at the end of days. May God continue to bless the unity he has established for us. Amen.