

As We Are One  
John 17

Turn to John 17. This is another sermon on how we treat one another. This is the third of four messages on the “one another” theme from the Gospel of John.

I am speaking on “one another” for two reasons. The first is that the covid years were particularly hard on church unity in our area and in our country. Christians had energy against one another as I have never seen before, so some messages on this seemed the right thing to do.

The second reason is that I am slowly writing a book on this: that the main mission of the church in the world is to love one another and to treat one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord’s family. It is not our only mission in the world, but it is our main purpose and calling.

Our church has held this up for a long time. We had our first covenant of membership in the year 2000, 22 years ago, and we were all ready for that by then. But there are no preachers saying that “love one another” is the main calling of the church. They usually say some kind of work out there in the world is the real mark of a healthy, Spirit-led church.

And I have not come across any books saying this, either. I have no desire to write a book. I am not doing this because I want to write a book, but because *someone* needs to say these things, at least get it out there.

I have also learned that I can’t write a book. I am not able, it comes out garbled and tedious. What I write is sermons. So I am slowly compiling a book of sermons from the Gospels and Acts to persuade people that the center of our calling is how we live together before the Lord. That is not our entire call, but it is the center of God’s call to churches.

It will not persuade many. For now, that’s okay, I just need to put it out there. How people respond is in God’s hands not mine. And *that* is why you will get quite a few sermons on that theme from the Gospels and Acts. These sermons from John, after some editing, will be included. There will be nothing in this book that you have not heard live from me. Now, Jn 17.

As We are One – John 17:1-5

Three times in this prayer, Jesus asks the Father that we, the believers, would be one in the same way that the Father and the Son are one. So we will first talk about how the Father and Son “are one.” The Father and Son relationship has many sides, even just in John 17. So we will just read the first five verses, which give us the basic idea.

We need already to be thinking about how we in this church treat one another, because Jesus will ask that we would be one just as Father and Son are one. What happens between the Father and the Son is a picture of what Jesus prays will happen between us. With that in mind, let's read.

*Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you gave him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*

Two things are real obvious here. One, they are family, they are a father and a son, a parent and a child. The family image is front and center here. The other obvious thing is that the Father and the Son both glorify the other. We hear it twice from Father to Son, and twice from Son to Father. "Father, *glorify* your Son, that your Son may *glorify* you. I brought you *glory* by finishing the work. Now, Father, *glorify* me in your presence."

There are other things going on here: the Father gave the Son authority, and the Father gave the Son work to do, which the Son has completed. But the two strongest themes are the strong and intimate family connection, father and son, parent and child.

And second, a big part of their relationship is that they will bring glory to the other. The Father wants the Son to look good, and the Son wants the Father to look good.

That's not the whole story of their relationship, but that's enough to get us a good start in the right direction. Now, let's look at what else the Son asks for.

I Pray for Those you Gave Me – 17:6-11

*I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*

We're mostly interested in the last few lines of this, but did you catch what Jesus calls us? You are I are the ones that the Father gave the Son out of the world. When Jesus speaks to us, he says, "You did not choose me, I chose you." But when he talks to the Father in this prayer, we are the people that the Father gave him.

We belonged to the Father, and the Father gave us to Jesus, so that Jesus would give us eternal life. That's who we are. I cannot really get my head around it. Five times in this prayer, we are the people that God gave to Jesus.

*V9 - I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

I pray for them, I am not praying for the world, but for them. That is a startling line. We will see later in the prayer that Jesus has a real interest in the world. But even then, he does not pray for the world. I don't want to make more of this than I should, but nevertheless it is a significant contrast.

*V11 - Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*

The name of God is *Yahweh*, and Jesus mentions the name several times in this prayer, because the Father gave his name, that name, to Jesus. So the power of that name is all the raw power of God. In particular, *Yahweh* is the covenant God. *Holy Father, keep them, protect them, by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.*

Jesus prays for us that we his people would be one as he and the Father are one. That's the core request. That we would be family, and that we would bring glory to one another, as do Father and Son. Jesus has already commanded us three times to love one another as he loved us, so that will be our part in this.

To us Jesus gives a solemn command: love one another as I loved you. To the Father, he asks for our protection, "keep them." Later on, in v15, Jesus will ask, *keep them from the evil one, protect them from the evil one.*

When we are not one with each other, the evil one is a big part of the problem. We think we're wrestling against flesh and blood, but we are not. Apparently it will take a lot of obeying the new command, on our part, and a lot of protection from the Holy Father, on his part, for us to be one as the Father and the Son are one.

Do not miss the solemn urgency of v11. God is not just the Father, in this line he's the Holy Father, and also Jesus reminds the Father twice of his name. And we know enough from the other Gospels, about how the apostles treated each other, that for them to stay together as one after Jesus left would take some doing. Would the Holy God, who covenants with his people, make us one? And protect and guard us so we would be one? The Lord prays for that.

### That the World May Believe – 17:20-21

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

“Those who believe in me through their message.” At the end of John 16, Jesus tells the disciples that the Spirit of truth will testify about Jesus, and his disciples will testify as well, since they’ve been with him since the beginning. In this prayer, Jesus says, “as you sent me, I have sent them.” In John 20 Jesus says, “as the Father sent me, so I send you.” So there is a definite sending theme in the words of Jesus in John.

But it is not the focus. The Lord’s passion is how his people will treat one another. Here the prayer goes beyond his followers at that time to all who will believe. Now he explicitly included you and me in this prayer, all who believe because the message has gone out. The request? *That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us.*

Jesus wants us all to be in the family relationship he has with the Father. There is a real sense here that we all are brought into the oneness and fellowship of the Trinity. We stay human, we don’t become God, but we share that mutual glorifying of one another and loving one another that happens between Father and Son. But it does not work if we are not getting along with each other.

*So that the world may believe that you have sent me.* When Jesus prays that all his followers would be one, he is in a sense praying for the world. The best thing Jesus can do for the world is to ask the Father for all his followers to be one, because that way the world will believe that the Father sent the Son.

In John, to believe that God sent Jesus is saving faith. If all of us are one, then the world will be invited to saving faith. The world will find our oneness a persuasive argument that Jesus really did come from God, and will be pulled toward saving faith.

This is pretty much what Jesus told us when he first gave the new command: *by this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (13:35).

This also means that when we do *not* love one another as Jesus loved us, when we are *not* one, then the world has good reason to doubt that God sent Jesus.

### That the World May Know – 17:22-23

*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity.*

What exactly is our glory? The Father gave the Son glory, and the Son has passed this on to us, to the people God gave him, *so that* we could be one as Father and Son are one, *so that* we could be brought to complete unity.

Our unity, our oneness, is our glory. For the Father and the Son, their oneness and their love for each other is their glory. That's what makes them glorious. Jesus the Son has passed on that glory to us, so that we could be one, so that our unity would be perfect, and that would be our glory.

In vv22-23, Jesus is not asking for anything. Jesus has already asked the Father to make us one as they are one, and in v22 he's telling the Father that he's done his part – he gave us the glory the Father gave him, so that we could be one and perfectly united.

*Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

Again, Jesus has an eye on the world in all this. IF we will love one another, and live in unity, the world will know two things. The first one Jesus already mentioned, the world will know that God sent Jesus into the world. That's big.

The other is that the world will know that God loves us in the same way God loved Jesus. I don't know how all that works, how our oneness will accomplish those things. What I know or don't know doesn't matter. Jesus prays this with assurance, he has no doubts, and he wants his followers to listen carefully and get this down, which apparently they did.

If we are one as Father and Son are one, that is our glory, and the world will know that God sent Jesus, and will know that God loves us just as he loved Jesus.

Asking and Receiving from God

Several times in chapters 14-16 Jesus taught that whatever we ask from God, he will give it. The context always assumes that we are in obedience to the Lord's commands and we want to bring glory to the Father. But given that, it always sounds like we get what we ask for.

But in John 17, Jesus prays that we would be one as he and the Father are one. It is a good prayer. The prayer, however, has not been answered. All of his followers are still not one. There is still plenty of division within the people that the Father gave the Son.

I don't know how to explain this, why God has not answered this prayer more completely. But this is clear: the Son knows what it's like to pray the right prayer and not have it answered. Hang on to that, because sometimes we need to remember that. Sometimes the right prayer is not answered, or at least it takes a long, long time.

On the other hand, we should assume that the unity we do experience, whenever that happens, happens because God heard this prayer and is still guarding us so that we will be one.

### Conclusion

*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

*Father, I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

This is how the perfect church actually lived, the Jerusalem church at the start, at the end of Acts 2. The apostles preached the gospel. The Lord always sends some to preach the gospel. The church, however, the 3000 new believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, were entirely focused on one another and their life together.

“All I have is yours, and all you have is mine.” Jesus said to the Father in John 17. That’s just how those believers in Acts 2 lived with each other. And the world paid attention. The unbelievers around them were impressed. And the Lord added to their number each day those who were being saved. May we be one. Amen.

**PRAYER:** Holy Father, we get some of this right, but it sure could be better. Forgive us. Protect us by the power of your name, the name you gave Jesus, so that we all would be one, as you and your Son are one. May we be one, Father, as you are in the Son, and the Son is in you. May we all be in you, so that the world would believe that you sent Jesus. May we be brought to complete unity, so the world would know that you sent Jesus, and would know that you love us the same way you love Jesus. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.