

lesson three

OCTOBER 13–19

That They All May Be **One**

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me’ ” (John 17:20, 21, NKJV).



In order to be one, we have to come together—not just with those who we call our friends or those who we go to church with—but with other individuals as well because they are our neighbors. By coming together, we will continue to grow spiritually.

John 17

Introduction *The Separation Solution*

Satan had so successfully painted a picture of God that resembled his own attributes that humans worshiped Him as a vengeful dictator more than an omni-benevolent Lord. So Jesus shows up to fix that, and by His life and ministry He reveals the true character of God because of His intimacy with Him. This oneness between Father and Son is thematic throughout John 17, but Jesus goes further in His prayer, including His disciples in that unity, praying “that they may be one, as we are” (verse 11).

Conservatives and liberals, Androids and iPhones, Red Sox and Yankees, and the list goes on!

If we take a quick glance at society, it's clear that any vertical rift between God and humankind is definitely mirrored or even rivaled by the horizontal rifts that we see every day among humanity. In fact, during the building of the Tower of Babel the sin of pride had literally almost made its way up into the heavens, so God divided humanity by languages. Sin causes separation from God and from our fellow humans through not only linguistic but cultural, ethnic, economic, and ideological boundaries! Our polarized world of varying opinions, origins, and perspectives is due to the fact of sin's existence. Conservatives and liberals, Androids and iPhones, Red Sox and Yankees, and the list goes on!

When my Anglophone, Caucasian, iPhone-using, Republican friend is seen washing the feet of a Filipino, Android-using, Democrat, there is harmony, just like Jesus standing between humanity and God, each of them become a window into seeing individuals of their background in a more positive light. Thus they then become a window to the world: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). As people of the world view harmony where there is typically hate, charity where there is typically a challenge, it shows them that God's love could actually transcend the pitfalls of human nature! This is evidenced in part after Jesus' crucifixion, where God works for the removal of not only sin but also its effect: separation. The newly formed church soon after receives the gift of tongues, and believers can see that God's ideal for restoration of unity is not just the vertical sense but the horizontal as well! And believe it or not, it's happening again.

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is actually recorded as being not just the most ethnically diverse Christian denomination but, rather, the most racially diverse of *all* major religious groups in the United States! God is revealing once again and for the final time that He is uniting human beings with a bond that is infinitely stronger than what men use to divide.

Logos

The Inevitability of Unity

Gal. 2:20;
2 Cor. 5:21;
Rev. 14:4;
Rom. 5:6;
Eph. 3:10

In His opening statement in John 17, Christ acknowledged His mission to reunite the human race once more with God. The authority that soon would be granted Him would allow Him to bring peace to those who had so long been separated from their Maker. In Adam, humanity had been broken. Our representative in Eden chose self over a relationship with God and brought ungodliness—separation from God—upon humankind. From him, this unnatural state was passed on to us, his children. Jesus saw that if He took all of humanity's sin upon Himself and became an alternative representative of humankind, a second Adam, that humanity's selfish nature, both corporately and individually, could die with Him on the cross. It was this reality that Paul saw when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20, RSV).

The gospel has this power to unite all humanity.

If we believe that Christ allowed our selfish nature to fall on Him, then we can know that it has also died on the cross with Him. We have been justified, declared righteous, despite our flaws. It was Christ who took all of humanity upon Himself corporately in one righteous act, not on a case-by-case basis. Every man, woman, and child can lay claim to the Cross because it was their sin that was represented in Him. He became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

The perfect life of Christ then saves us and works in us to make us holy in our daily living. The sanctification that Christ purposed for Himself led to His life being taken. In the same way, Jesus knew that His followers would grow day by day into a closer relationship with Him to the point that, if needed, they would surrender even their own lives.

This gospel teaches us that we are able to be with Christ where He is. This togetherness is available not only in a future sense of the Second Coming but also to us today. As Christ is in us, we are also in Him; and as we trust that He lives out His perfect life in us, we get to experience eternal life with Him. There's no reason to doubt our own assurance, because if we believe we are in Him, then we are experiencing heaven here and now, for we "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4, NKJV).

Through His resurrection, Christ knew this supreme act would have the power to unite all of humanity forever through His own eternal life. That which Christ obtained for humans was a reconciliation to God the Father. Jesus would represent an imperfect people perfected in Him by His own selfless life and death—a people no longer void of holiness and unfit to stand before the Father but, rather, a people united with the Spirit of God. All those who

accept this gift become children of God, connected as closely in relationship to the Father as is the Son.

Christ was totally faithful throughout His life in representing God's glory and name, His character. But Jesus foresaw that His followers would be persecuted for their simple faith in Heaven's gift by a world unable to see past its own selfishness. Our Savior asks that our joy would be full, that the truth of His gospel would resonate so deeply in our hearts and minds that we are overcome with gratitude, so completely entrenched in its peace that nothing in this world is able to shake our faith in Him. To be kept from the evil one is not implying that we will never face trials—or even failures. Jesus would keep us from a life of self-condemnation precipitated by the work of Satan's accusing agencies. Satan is ever tempting us to turn our eyes from Jesus and back to ourselves. Many fall prey to their own guilt and shame, believing that their sin disqualifies them from a relationship with God, but this is not the case, for "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

The gospel has this power to unite all humanity. All who come to acknowledge their justification in Christ will be humbled and recognize that every human heart, the rich person to the beggar, is equal in its selfishness. In Christ all souls are equally valued and sought after. He yearns to unite all in His death and raise them into His life so that the human experience would mirror that of the Son and Father. With this intensity of love and insight, Jesus asks that we all may be one.

Just as Jesus had displayed the compassion of our heavenly Father to His followers, His disciples were, in turn, empowered by the Spirit to share this good news with Judea and then the world through lives submitted to God rather than human desire, proving that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Promised One from heaven. As they preached, new believers were to experience the same joy and thus be united in the work of redemption.

Therefore, it is Christ's purpose that His glory—His selfless character—would be revealed not just to this dying world but also to heavenly agencies that are waiting to see the conclusion of the great controversy. Our Lord desires that "the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10, NKJV). *Manifold* here means "many-angled," and it is through a diverse but unified body that God knows His love will be displayed. The church exists for no other purpose than to reveal the name of Jesus.

REACT

1. How does Christ's death and resurrection achieve unity?
2. What is the church, and what is its purpose?
3. What changes do you need to make to be in harmony with God's plan for unity? What changes does your local church need to make?

Testimony

What Must I Do to Have Oneness in Christ?

Gal. 3:8, 9

“Listen to Jesus, follow His counsel and you will not go astray from the wise and mighty Counsellor, the only true Guide, the only One who can give you peace, happiness, and fullness of joy. . . . Whatever others may think of us or may do to us, it need not disturb this oneness with Christ, this fellowship of the Spirit. You know we cannot find rest anywhere out of Christ.”¹

“The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness.”

“The terms of this oneness between God and man in the great covenant of redemption were arranged with Christ from all eternity. The covenant of grace was revealed to the patriarchs. The covenant made with Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the law was spoken on Sinai was a covenant confirmed by God in Christ, the very same gospel which is preached to us.”²

“The great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When you as individual members of the church love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, then there will be no labored efforts to be in unity; there will be a oneness in Christ, the ears to reports will be closed, and no one will take up a reproach against his neighbor. The members of the church will cherish love and unity and be as one great family.”³

“When Christ’s prayer is fully believed, when its instruction is brought into the daily life of God’s people, unity of action will be seen in our ranks. Brother will be bound to brother by the golden bonds of the love of Christ. The Spirit of God alone can bring about this oneness. He who sanctified Himself can sanctify His disciples. United with Him, they will be united with one another in the most holy faith. When we strive for this unity as God desires us to strive for it, it will come to us.”⁴

REACT

1. If God has called us to be one with Him, what can help us learn to be at one with Christ?
2. What can happen if we learn to love God more than anything else and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves?
3. God longs to be one with us. With that in mind, what are some things that may disrupt the oneness with God in our own personal lives?

1. Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 298 (ellipses in original).

2. Ellen G. White, “Christ Our Hope,” *Signs of the Times*, August 24, 1891.

3. Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 15, p. 150.

4. Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 45.

John 17

Evidence *Say Your Last Prayer*

Though some English translations supply the word “prayer,” John records that Jesus simply lifted His eyes up to heaven and talked to His Father. It was a conversation He had. Sometimes Jesus knelt as He prayed (Luke 22:41), but more often Jesus preferred to look toward heaven as He prayed (John 11:41; Mark 7:34).

When He most needed it, He prayed for us.

Jesus’ prayer was truly informal—He was speaking to His Father, not to some distant, brooding deity. “Father” was Jesus’ strikingly intimate way to address the God of the universe. “There is no evidence in pre-Christian Jewish literature that Jews addressed God as *Abba*’ ” (“Father”). While God does refer to Himself as a father 15 times in the Old Testament, when you turn to the New Testament, God is addressed as “Father” more than 150 times in the Gospels alone!¹

Jesus’ insistence on seeing God as His Father—and getting us to call Him that too—is a key part of John’s Gospel, in which the central focus is knowing Jesus (John 1:1–3). This theme is picked up in a big way in John 17, when Jesus declares that eternal life is all about knowing the Father and the Son (John 17:3). We are meant to have the same relationship with Jesus that He had with His Father.

Who did Jesus pray for on the eve of His crucible? Mainly, us. Jesus’ final prayer can be broken up into several subjects. First (John 17:1–5), Jesus prayed that He might glorify His Father. Second (verses 6–19), Jesus prayed for His disciples (those followers He was working with), that they might know the Father as He did. Third (verses 20–26), Jesus prayed for all future generations of Christians (those the disciples would work with). With the Cross blocking His way, Jesus looked up and beyond it. “Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame” (Heb. 12:2, NLT). When He most needed it, He prayed for us.

And what was the key subject of Jesus’ prayer? Unity. Four times, Jesus prays that His followers may be as united with each other as He is with His Father. Drawing closer to Jesus will naturally mean we draw closer His other followers. God in Jesus has torn off the labels the world sticks on—race, sex, ethnicity, age, language—and created “in himself one new humanity” (Eph. 2:15, NIV). Jesus’ last prayer wasn’t a desperate plea for His own life; it was a bold vision for the new world waiting on the other side of the Cross.

1. Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1997, s.v. “Fatherhood of God.”

How-to Unity Among Christians

Mark 9:38–41;
John 10:16

Jesus prayed for unity among Christians. Much like the unity of marriage (family), church unity is increasingly threatened. We use words such as *church family* or *brother in Christ* or *sister in Christ*, yet what do we do when, or if, the family-like unity is lacking? The Bible says that “brother will betray brother” (Mark 13:12, NIV). In Matthew 24:12, we are told that “the love of many will grow cold” (NKJV). So how do we keep unity in these times?

It doesn't “just happen.”

As in marriage, divorce from the faith must not be an option. We are brothers and sisters for eternity, we are united by something stronger than ourselves: the belief in Jesus as our Savior. So there are a few things we can do to pursue unity, despite the risk of brotherly love growing cold:

Be convicted. Study the Bible. If we don't have a knowledge of Jesus or His Word, then we have no knowledge of what to unify around. We need the Word—daily. We need to realize that what unites us is stronger than what might divide us. The risk of confusion between unity and uniformity is too high. Spiritual maturity is knowing the difference between core values of our faith and peripheral beliefs.

Be connected. Satan has a billion ways to start fights in the church. He will often target one side in order to destroy the other. We have to stay alert, updated, connected to the Source of power. Your computer needs to stay connected to the internet in order for its antivirus program to get the updates needed to keep up with all the security threats—so do you. Prayer is your Wi-Fi.

Be committed. Spiritual battles—we win some, we lose some. We need to make a daily choice to follow Jesus and stay committed to Him. That's a main part of long-term, healthy relationships. Have some spiritual grit and determination to stay the course! We must live our Christian lives with intention.

Unity can't be taken for granted. It doesn't “just happen.” It is something we work hard at. That is why one of Jesus' last prayers was for unity: that we may be one. If it was that important to Him, then we must make it our priority. Unity is difficult to obtain—but not impossible. Let us unite in being an answer to Jesus' prayer.

REACT

1. What else can you do to be Jesus' answered prayer for unity?
2. How would you disciple or motivate your brothers and sisters in Christ to stay united?

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John 17:20, 21, 26

Opinion *Oneness for Won-ness*

“I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Though largely attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, there is some speculation as to the origin of this quote. But regardless of the quote’s source, these words carry great resonance with Jesus’ intercession for His disciples, oneness, and soul winning.

In John 17 part of Jesus’ prayer is for those who will believe in Him “through their word” (“their” in this verse referring to the disciples [John 17:6–19]). If we, then, as modern disciples of Jesus, are not living in the unity that Jesus prayed for us in the previous verses, we rob those who would believe in Him through our “word” of the chance to know Him and be brought into the unity of Christ.

Believers’ oneness with Christ and the Father directly affects the world’s belief in Him.

In John 17:21 Jesus says to His Father that He wants believers to be one in Them so “the world may believe that You sent Me” (NKJV); believers’ oneness with Christ and the Father directly affects the world’s belief in Him. Then in verse 26 Jesus prays that He has declared God’s name to us, so that we will be filled with the love of the Father. The greatest injustice we as Christians have served the world is not heeding this declaration, thereby making us void of that love, restricting our ability to be effective witnesses.

These verses personally challenge me to live outside of myself and think of how my actions affect others. They cause me to recall the words written in Romans that challenge us not to live in such a way that we would cause anyone to “stumble” (Rom. 14:21, RSV). Despite the controversy that sometimes surrounds Paul’s meaning here, the real questions we should ask ourselves are “Does the thing I’m about to do reflect my oneness with Christ, and will the Father’s love be made manifest through me?”

If we can make it our individual missions to be at one with Jesus and the Father, heaven will have to make room for even more of God’s children to come home, and there will be no room for anyone on earth to even think that we Christians are so unlike our Christ.

REACT

1. Has anything that you have ever said or done affected someone’s coming to Jesus, inside or outside of the church?
2. When was the last time your union with Christ was reflected in your actions?
3. How does your personal unity with Christ affect your church’s unity with Christ and its ability to minister to nonbelievers?

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Exploration *That the World May Believe*

John 17:21

CONCLUDE

Christ's prayer in John 17:21 highlights a critical point in understanding the importance of unity and oneness. He says, "That they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that You sent Me" (NKJV). Our oneness with God is a testimony that the Father truly sent Jesus to Earth! Our oneness with Him and our unity with one another show the world that Christ is exactly who He claimed to be. The closer we are to Christ individually, the more effective our collective efforts to spread the gospel will be.

CONSIDER

- Writing a personal reflection on your current role in your local church and what you can do to make your church a more intimate community.
- Organizing a regular meeting for group meals or a time for "breaking bread" with fellow believers, new visitors, and friends in your congregation. Try organizing a day during the week, or consider using Sabbath afternoons for weekly potlucks at your church or in a more intimate setting.
- Spending your morning or evening devotion time in nature. Focus on the patterns of unity and oneness you see in the plants and animals around you.
- Recording an audio diary of your prayers and requests to God. Review them every three to six months to highlight how the Lord has led you.
- Drawing, painting, or sketching a picture that you think best symbolizes the concept of unity or oneness. Transfer your picture onto "Welcome" or "We Miss You" cards and send them to visitors attending your church or to members who have been absent from the congregation.

CONNECT

Genesis 1:26–28; 11:1–9; Amos 3:3; Acts 1:13, 14; 2:41–47; 4:32–37.

Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 10, "The Tower of Babel"; *My Life Today*, "Reverence for God," p. 281; *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2, "The Training of the Twelve."