

Jesus Prayed “May They Be One” Just Before Being Crucified

To speak of unity in the church can often meet resistance. “We can’t align ourselves with this group! This one is heretical! I never could sit through their worship!”

On and on it goes – the reasons why we must stay “pure and apart” from some other Christian person(s) or fellowship. Watching debates on social media is often painful.

It is true; we must not agree with things we know to be absolutely non-biblical and in error. And yet, the familiar quote “in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity, takes that into account.” According to these words, only in essentials is unity called for.

There are essentials to the Christian faith. For example, Jesus Christ is Lord. He was crucified, buried and, on the third day, rose again from the dead. The Bible is God’s Word. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But, as the saying above indicates, there are non-essentials and in those, we need to lay down our “weapons.”

I read some of the commentary in my NIV Study Bible regarding Jesus’ pre-arrest prayer in John 17 and it is convicting. But first a portion of the prayer, as described in John 17:

Jesus prayed for believers:

“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. 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” (John 17:20-23, NIV).

Jesus prayed for complete unity among believers so that the world would then believe. His prayer was a prayer of evangelism – that we who believe would lay down our need to be right, to be in control, and would instead love each other as the Father and Son love each other.

And why? So that a watching world would find an irresistible allure to a movement that would be full of peace and genuine kindness.

As I said, I studied the commentary about this prayer that occurred just before Jesus was arrested. Here is a line regarding John 17:21: “The unity of believers should have an effect on outsiders, to convince them of the mission of Christ. Jesus’ prayer is a rebuke of the groundless and often bitter divisions among believers.”

Jesus’ prayer is a rebuke to division and disunity. It was the prominent thing on His mind just before His arrest, torture and death.

I have had the pleasure of meeting a Christian author and Bible teacher, Traci Rhoades, for whom this plea of Jesus. “May they all be one” is her current life’s mission.

Traci has made it her habit to explore other Christian fellowships to find out about worship and sacramental practices, etc. and to honor others. As she has explored, she has incorporated some spiritual practices into her life that have had meaning to her and that have taken her closer to Jesus. She recommends that we all explore in the same manner.

Traci was my recent guest on *Rooted by the Stream* and offered insights into how to interact with other Christian traditions

and why we should. She is the author of the book, *Not All Who Wander (Spiritually) Are Lost*. To hear more of our conversation, listen to episode 78 on Rooted by the Stream. {eoa}

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