

The Kind of Unity That Can Splinter Denominational Mindsets

The “unity of the Spirit” is a great example of a powerful truth that has been reduced to mean “we should all agree on everything so the world will believe there really is a God.”

Viewing the Bible through the lens of denominationalism redefines the unity of the Spirit to mean “the unity of understanding and agreeing upon the Word.” Let’s consider one of the premier passages of Scripture on unity—the prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17:

“... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. May they also be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory which You gave Me, that they may be one even as We are one: I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfect in unity, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:20–23, MEV).

Unity Between Believers

I have heard many messages on unity in which this passage is used to exhort believers to get along. But did you notice that, contrary to popular opinion, the unity Jesus prayed for in this passage is not the unity between believers, but the unity between a believer and God? Look closely at His prayer. Jesus petitioned the Father “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us” (v. 21). It is easy to assume that “all be one” refers to being one with each other, but Jesus defines it as being one with God.

Now look at this part of the next two verses: " ... just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." Again, the key emphasis here is "I in them." Nowhere does Jesus pray that we should be "in" each other.

Denominational Mindsets

It does not seem to occur to most of us that Jesus could not even get His 12 disciples to get along with each other when He walked the Earth with them. But when we read these verses with denominational mindsets, we need to see selectively that Jesus is praying against disagreements, because these days, disagreement equals church splits. In reading with our visual accent here, we miss one of the most powerful truths in the Bible.

God wants to be one with His people! The prayer that Jesus prayed in John 17 is actually an extension of the talk He had earlier with His disciples, in John 14. Let's check it out:

" ... He who has seen Me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority. But the Father who lives in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me. Or else believe Me on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me will do the works that I do also. And he will do greater works than these, because I am going to My Father" (John 14:9–12, MEV).

Jesus told His guys, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." We know for a fact that Jesus was not saying that He is the Father, because another voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" when Jesus was baptized (Matt. 3:17). Jesus was not talking to Himself there. And in John 14, He was simply making the point that He and the Father are an inseparable unity.

Celestial Union

Think about it this way: If you mix red paint and blue paint, you get the color purple. Every time you see purple, you know it is the manifestation of these two primary colors. But I defy you to separate them once they are mixed. The Father and the Son are the manifestation of a celestial union that transcends human rationalization or finite explanation.

Jesus said the works (miracles) He did were signs of the Father's presence working through Him. This tells us that, while we may not be able to explain the nature of this union, we can experience it. But wait, it gets even better. Jesus shocks us with this next decree: "He who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do" (John 14:12).

Now let's put this all together. Jesus prayed in John 17 that the body of Christ would be united with the Godhead in the same way that He Himself is united with His Father. The implication is that when people see us, they have seen the Father. And if they don't believe us on account of our words, they should believe us on account of our works, because we are to do greater works than Jesus did. That is the kind of unity that will cause the world to know that the kingdom of God has come near them!

For more on this subject, check out the *Revised and Updated Edition of Heavy Rain: How to Flood Your World with God's Transforming Power* at .

Have you ever experienced this kind of unity? Tell me about it in the comments below. {eoa}

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