

106. Jesus' prayer for His church

January 7, 2018

The world renown Chinese pianist Lang Lang had led 100 pianists at one of his concerts. To make it happen, all 101 pianos had to be tuned together. But they didn't tune the other 100 pianos to Lang Lang's piano, though he was the main player of the concert, rather all the pianos were tuned to the same fork. By doing so, they were automatically tuned to each other. They were of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow.

The same goes for Christianity. If one hundred followers of Jesus Christ all tuned to our Lord Jesus Christ, they all would have the heart and fellowship of Christ and love for one another.

Let's do a quick recap of this chapter 17. In verses 1-5, Jesus prayed for Himself; in verses 6-19, He prayed for the eleven remaining disciples; finally, in verses 20-26, the Lord prays for all future believers, including us.

When we are in need, we'd like to ask for prayers from other people. How would you like to have the Son of God who sits at the right hand of God the Father and knows the heart of His Father to pray for you? You cannot find any better person to pray with you and for you. That is what Jesus is doing in this portion of the Scriptures.

A. JESUS PRAYED FOR OUR UNITY

John 17:20-23 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 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. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

1) Why did Jesus pray for our unity?

For three and a half years, Jesus had watched His disciples constantly bickering about who was the greatest among them. And He knew that the future believers wouldn't be any different. I wonder how He feels when He sees the condition of the church today that has so many divisions and contentions within.

Last Sunday I asked you guys to mingle before and after the service. And many of you did that. Isn't it great to get to know each other through even a short time? We cannot have unity within the body of Jesus Christ until we get to know each other. But the true unity goes deeper than superficial ways.

In asking for unity, Jesus shows us that He desires to see a deep connection between those who are connected to Him. The unity that Christ offers brings peace within and between persons. So, in this request, we could say that Jesus is praying for unity of belief. This unity originates from shared convictions. Belief is what binds us together. Not a vague faith, but a very specific faith in Jesus Christ, which brings unity with the Father and the Son.

from the dead, because we are sinners and cannot make our way to heaven with our good work, infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, and so on.

Some would ask, "What about the difference in denominational doctrines like the Southern Baptist vs. the Assembly of God?" I would answer, "What about it?" Do they believe in the core faith in Jesus Christ? Absolutely. Folks, we need to major in major, not in minor.

The differences in doctrines, such as speaking in tongue, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, eternal security of salvation, the end-time prophecies which are also known as 'eschatology', Bible versions – KJV, NIV, NASB, NKJV, etc., all of these are minors.

As many of you know, our worship leader pastor Al is the pastor of the Cornerstone Bible Church in Tucson. Do I and pastor Al see everything eye to eye? No. But since we both agree with the core faith in Jesus Christ, so we set aside the minor, minor differences to work together for the Kingdom of God.

If a believer does not have anything better to do except arguing who is right or wrong with these minor differences, that person needs a second or third job so that he doesn't have time to argue anymore.

But when a pastor teaches his congregation a flat out wrong doctrine, that is a completely different story. In October, 2011, Joel Osteen who has the biggest church in America, talked about Mormonism to a Washington Times reporter. In his interview, this is what Osteen said, "I believe that they [Mormons] are Christians. I don't know if it is the purest form of Christianity which I grew up with, but I know, Mitt Romney, I've never met him, I hear him saying, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God; He is my Savior." You know, that is the core issue. I am sure that there are other issues we don't agree on. But you know, you know, baptists, methodists, and catholics don't all agree on everything. That would be my take."

Are you kidding me, Joel Osteen? Does he know anything about Mormonism?

- Mormons believe that God the Father was once a man, but progressed to godhood.
- They don't believe in the Trinity.
- They believe that someday worthy men may become gods themselves.
- To the Mormons, Jesus' body was created through sexual union between God and Mary and he is a brother of Lucifer who became satan.
- To the Mormons, Jesus' death on the cross does not provide full atonement for all sin.

Jesus of Mormonism is NOT the same Jesus of Christianity. Mormonism has NEVER been a part of Christianity and never will. Joel Osteen either needs to study the Word of God, or he needs to quit being a pastor and find some other job.

While I am at this, I want all of you to understand a very popular word "interfaith" that was reinvented by reverend Oprah Winfrey not very long after 9/11, 2001. Our church or any Bible believing church should have nothing to do with this kind of nonsense gathering. It is like what the Southern Kingdom Judah and the Northern Kingdom Israel worshiped the God of Israel and the pagan gods of Canaanites at the same time in the OT. Whatever happened to them? They were conquered and became slaves of the pagan enemies. Many ungodly government entities would love to see that Christian churches cooperate with other religions. Not in a billion years.

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

The unity Jesus prayed for is WITHIN the body of Jesus Christ, the church, NOT outside of the church. The real danger is not atheism, but that we ask God to coexist comfortably with the idols of our heart.

2) Jesus prays for is unity in glory in v22.

What does this mean? Jesus gave all true believers His glory by completing His mission of revealing God in v4-6.

John 17:4-6 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. 6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.

Jesus' ultimate purpose was to present the splendor and character of God and His glory in such a way that God would become personally real to the disciples and every believer. They, in turn, were to pass on what they had received to others who would also believe. Those who, in fact, received the glory would become unified by their shared relationship with Christ.

3) What is the main purpose of this unity?

v21 that the world may believe that God sent Christ and that they may know this

v23 that the Father loves us as He loved His Son.

Our unity is a public witness, an announcement to the world that Jesus came from God and that God's love rests upon us as it did on His own Son.

When Jesus prays, it's not for uniformity – absolute similarity of organization, style, personality, and appearance. Neither does He pray for unanimity – absolute agreement of opinion within a group of people. Nor does He pray for union – absolute coalition or tight affiliation within the ranks of Christianity. What He does pray for is unity – oneness of heart, of faith, and of purpose.

One of the things that most impresses the world is the way Christians love each other and live together in harmony. The lost world cannot see God, but they can see Christians. What they see in us is what they will believe about God.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ. If Christians would really live according to the teachings of Christ, as found in the Bible, all of India would be Christian today." Shame on us. Please remember this: Out of 100 men, one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian.

B. JESUS PRAYED FOR OUR DESTINY

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

In this prayer, our Lord Jesus asks the Father to secure our eternal destiny. That security is based on the love between the Father and the Son. Can you come up with a better and more secure foundation than that? His prayer was that we will be with Him in heaven, where He would be surrounded in glory.

We have no idea what it is like to be forsaken by God while we are on this earth. The most vile and the loneliest man on this earth today is not forsaken by Him. Anyone can turn to Him as long as one can think conscientiously.

But when Christ took my sins and yours upon Himself, He was forsaken by God the Father for us. When Jesus Christ cried out on the cross, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?", it was the human cry of intense suffering, aggravated by the anguish of His innocent and holy life. The only people who were forsaken by God were the ones who rejected Jesus to their last breath by their own choices are now dead.

C. JESUS PRAYED FOR OUR RELATIONAL LOVE

John 17:25-26 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

The Father loves the Son, the Son loves us, and we, in turn, are to love others. This love should flow deep and wide and passes over any rocks of petty differences with the exception of any heresies that leads us to disgrace the name and glory of God.

Jesus declared that the world does not know the Father, but that we believers know Him because the Son has revealed the Father to us. The world certainly has many opportunities to get to know the Father, but it prefers to go on in blindness and hardness of heart. Our task as Christians is to bear witness to the lost world and share God's saving message.

Jesus also declares the importance of truth and love in the church. He makes it clear that truth and love must go together. It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. The mind grows by taking in truth, but the heart grows by giving out in love. Knowledge alone can lead to pride, and love alone can lead to wrong decisions. Christian love must not be blind!

The entire prayer of chapter 17 is based on the righteousness of God, who will vindicate the Son by glorifying Him. Jesus' revelation of God was founded on personal knowledge and personal communion. When He spoke of God, it was on the basis of intimate relationship and not philosophical speculation. The essence of the revelation lay in the love of God, which Jesus exhibited toward the disciples. His purpose was to perfect His union with them, that they in turn might know the Father. Jesus wanted to include them in the inner fellowship of the Triune God.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) To grow in unity in Christ means giving in.

It means refusing to get hung up on trivial disagreements or non-essential denominational differences. Those who enjoy Christian fellowship in its deepest sense have high tolerance levels within the body of Christ. As theologian Philipp Melancthon stated, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

2) To know your destiny means giving up.

Being secure in our future requires that we stop striving and simply give up and trust Jesus.

3) To show His love means giving out.

Christian love is visible and tangible. God not only tells us He loves us, but He has shown it. And we ought to do the same.