

UNITY AS CHRIST PRAYED FOR IT – John 17

By Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones¹

1. **“First, we notice that He is praying for particular people whom He designates as ‘these.’** They and they alone, are the subject of this unity. Who are ‘these’? In the chapter itself there are many answers to this question. ‘These’ are the people of whom He has said right at the beginning **that they have been given to Him by God.** That is a fundamental statement that He goes on repeating...

“Another thing He says about them is that **they are people who have been separated from the world.** ‘I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine’, He says in verse 9. That is a very important statement. Here are people who have been taken out of the world, separated from it; and **it for these, and for these alone, that He prays. There is no ‘universalism’ in this chapter...**

“We have a still more interesting and important definition as to who ‘these’ are in verses 6 to 8... **‘They have kept thy word.** This is of crucial importance. So much so that our Lord brings out the same idea again in verse 20, where we have: ‘Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.’ These have believed on Him and His Word; others are going to believe on Him through the same Word which these are now going to speak in the world. The emphasis is the same. He repeats it again in verse 25...

“What then are characteristics of these people? Again we must emphasize the element of separation and distinction. Our Lord does not pray for the world; He prays only for these people who have been given to Him... They are those who have ‘received’ His Word, His teaching, and particularly His teaching concerning Himself... **In other words, the unity of which He is speaking applies only to those who receive and believe this Word, what we now would call the gospel message.**

2. **“The second principle which He lays down in the eleventh verse concerns the origin of the unity.** You notice that He uses the word ‘keep’. ‘Holy Father,’ He says, ‘keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me.’ **Nowhere in this chapter is there an exhortation or an appeal to produce a unity. Our Lord is saying that the unity is already there, already in existence...** Our Lord is not dealing with something at which we should aim. Indeed our Lord does not address His disciples at all in this chapter. **It is a prayer to God to keep the unity that He, through His preaching, has already brought into existence among these people.**
3. **“The third point which our Lord raises is that of the nature of the unity:** ‘That they may be one, as we are.’ This is the fundamental text, as it were, on the subject, but as our Lord elaborates it in verses 20- to 23... **We notice at once that the essential character of the unity about which our Lord is speaking is that it is comparable to the unity that exists between the Father and the Son.** It is also comparable to the unity between the Son and people for whom He is praying.

“Light is thrown on this in certain verses of John 14. For instance, in verse 20... and in verse 21 (and) verse 23... We deduce from this that **the unity which is to obtain in the church is something which involves this unity of essence, of being...** **In other words, the unity that our Lord is talking about is a unity that clearly can obtain only among those who are regenerate or born again.** It is not something, by definition, that one can decide to *go in for*. It is not like a number of people deciding to form a coalition or a society in order that certain objects or purposes should be carried out... It is not even a matter of friendship. It is deeper than that. It is like a family relationship. You have no choice about it and what it involves. You are born into a family. Though you may disagree with member off your family you cannot get rid of the relationship. It is a matter of blood and of essence. So is the unity of the church.

Summary: **“So we find here that the whole of our Lord’s statement is (1) not an exhortation to us to do anything, but is a prayer to His Father asking Him (2) to preserve this unity that is already in existence. Moreover (3) that unity is essentially spiritual, (4) is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the act of regeneration, and (5) shows itself in a common belief and reception of the teaching concerning our Lord’s person and work. Any ‘unity’ which lacks these characteristics is not the unity of which our Lord speaks in John 17.”**

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “*The Basis of Christian Unity*”(part of two addresses given in June, 1962) reprinted in “*Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions*” (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, Scotland, 1989), pp. 121-126