

“Of One Mind and Purpose”

A Bible Study On Division and Unity in Christ

By the Rev. Steven E. King

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INTRODUCTION: Of One Mind and Purpose

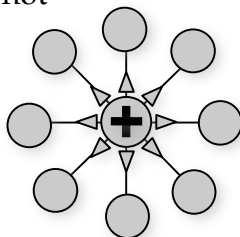
Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one."

(John 17:17-21)

Much is said in contemporary Christian circles about "unity" with others – within individual church bodies, as well as with Christians of other denominations. It is most often described as a goal to be achieved by human endeavor, by putting a priority on dialog and compromise over religious doctrine and sectarian truth claims. This worldly "unity" is often extended to other religions as well, as the call to a universal tolerance and acceptance of all beliefs as equally valid.

However, when Jesus spoke of his disciples as "being one" with another, he said nothing about human organizations or institutions. Neither did he speak of unity being found in tolerance and affirmation of others. What he did speak of was unity in God's Word. His prayer above was not simply that his disciples have a relationship with one another, but that they would be joined by a common belief in the truth he had revealed from the Father, sanctified ("set apart") by his Word.

This unity in faith and spirit is not something that we create as human beings, but is something that God himself accomplishes in us. God draws us together with each other in the common relationship we have with Christ.



In simple terms, we are only connected with one another because we are connected to Christ. As Christians, our faith centers in him when his Spirit draws us in faith to God's

Word. This is what Martin Luther meant when he wrote in the Small Catechism:

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and live a godly life now and to eternity ...

In the same way, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian Church on earth, keeping it united with Jesus Christ in one true faith.

Scripture teaches that we who trust and believe in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, are knit together by God into one body, under one Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit. When *unity* is spoken of in the Bible, it is not an affirmation of many things, but of one. As Paul wrote:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

This Bible study is meant to help people explore more deeply what Scripture means when it speaks of true Christian unity as being "united in the same mind and the same purpose." It is our hope that we would recognize the difference between unity based on earthly institutions and human organizations and the unity established by God's Word and faith in Christ.

- Pastor Steven King

Using this Study

This study is designed to be led by a pastor or lay facilitator in a small-group question and discussion format. Each Scripture passage includes a number of questions that are meant to help participants understand the verses and what they mean for our present lives of faith.

Many of the questions are open-ended, asking what participants think about what the Bible is saying. Participants should listen for how God may be using the text to encourage or challenge them in their own faith. Always remember, real biblical study is more than just a conversation amongst ourselves; it is an opportunity to hear God himself speak to us through his Word.

"That They May Be One"

SET APART IN GOD'S WORD

Prayer

Gracious Lord, you have set us apart as your people and made us one in faith. By your Holy Spirit, keep us steadfast in your Word, so that we, with the living Church throughout the ages, may be united in one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. We pray in Christ's name. Amen

Introduction

One of the promises often repeated in the New Testament is that we, as Christians, are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). We, who trust and believe in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, are set apart and distinct not in ourselves but only through this God-given faith in Him.

Jesus spoke of this genuine Christian unity in what is known as his "High Priestly Prayer" on behalf of his disciples. Found in John, Chapter 17, Jesus' prayer for his original disciples — and for us — is that we would share his unity through faith in his Word. Jesus prayed:

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." (John 17:17-21)

Jesus' prayer was not simply that his disciples have a relationship with one another, but that they would be joined by a common belief in the truth he had revealed from the Father. The "oneness" Jesus spoke of is a unity in God's Word. It is this faith that brings us together and sets us apart from the rest of the world.

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast

✠ *Read: Joshua 23:1-16*

This lesson comes from the end of the Book of Joshua. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the people had finally entered the Promised Land. Under Joshua's leadership, God had given them many victories and reestablished them in the land of their ancestors. Now, as Joshua reached the end of his life, he called the people to remain steadfast in faith and obedience to the Word that God had given them.

- 1) What do you think motivated Joshua to say what he did? What is he most concerned about?
- 2) What does Joshua say God had done for the people? What verses point to the fact that Israel could not have accomplished this on its own?
- 3) On the most basic level, what was it that set the people of Israel apart from the people of other nations? How did this unite them? In what way(s) were they commanded to remain distinct?
- 4) In verse 23:6, what does the word "steadfast" mean? In a practical sense, what does it mean to "hold fast to the Lord your God" (v. 23:8)?

God's name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God live in harmony with it.

- from Martin Luther's Small Catechism

Sanctified in the Word

✠ *Read: John 17:1-24*

On the night before his death, Jesus prayed for his disciples and those who would come after them. This text is often referred to as Jesus' "high priestly prayer" in that he intercedes for the sake of those who belong to him. Like Joshua, Jesus made it clear that their unity was found in faithfulness to God's Word.

5) In verses 6-10, how does Jesus illustrate his own "oneness" with the Father? How does this relate to what Jesus says in verses 14-15? What do his followers have in common with him?

6) Does Jesus say anything here about joining a group or maintaining membership in an organization? In what sense were the first disciples *united* with one another? In what way are we "one" with them as well?

7) Is it significant that Jesus' words about unity come in the form of a prayer to God rather than a command to the disciples? Do you get the sense from what Jesus said that the disciples' "oneness" was the result of their own action or God's?

8) If we compare the Church to individuals watching a television in their home, are we united because we own the same brand TV or because we are watching the same broadcast? How is this like our unity in faith?

9) Throughout this lesson, what is Jesus talking about when he refers to the "world"? What is the relationship of his disciples to the world?

10) In verse 17, the term *sanctify* literally means "make holy." When you hear the word "holy" what do you think of? How does God's Word "set us apart" from the world?

Definition: Sanctify (v.)

Greek: *hagiazō* = "to make holy" or "to set apart"
(as in being set apart for God or by God)

Thinking Like Scripture

Consider these additional Bible verses in the context of our current theme:

✠ *Read: Deuteronomy 7:6-11*

11) In verse 7:6, what does Scripture mean when it says "you are a people holy to the Lord your God"? What was so special about these people?

12) In terms of cause and effect: How is the "chosen-ness" of God's people related to faith and obedience? Is one based on the other? In what way does the initiative always rest in God?

✠ *Read: Ephesians 4:1-6*

13) What is the difference between "creating" unity and "maintaining" unity (v. 4:3)? In what way do our actions contribute to, or detract from, the unity we have with one another as Christians?

14) In what way is "the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace" called for in verse 4:3 more than just saying, "Can't we all just get along?" In what sense is a common **faith** at the center of this?

✠ *Read: 1 Corinthians 1:4-10*

15) How many times does the name Christ appear in these few verses? In what sense is Christ the *source* as well as the *object* of our faith?

16) In the context of everything we have seen in this session, what do you think it means to be "united in the same mind and purpose" (v. 1:10)?