

Kingdom Unity Part 2

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[0:00] Verses 20 to 23 of John 17. Jesus says, I do not ask for these only, meaning the 11 in front of him, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

The glory that you have given me, I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you loved me.

That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Before and after the Fourth of July, my wife and I had the great privilege to be in Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia during that time, and as you can imagine, it was a great time.

The celebration of our nation's 250th anniversary this year actually goes beyond our nation. It's also a celebration, I believe, of democracy.

Government for the people, by the people. Nothing like this, to this extent, is truly seen around the world. We are a unique nation, which is why people from other nations want to come here.

[1:49] I've seen reports that athletes participating in the World Cup have been amazed and impressed as they have been toured our country. Maybe a little bit envious at times.

But as someone said, democracy provides no built-in guarantees against immoral behavior.

E pluribus unum. Out of many one. When's the last time you heard that phrase? I can't remember the last time. I haven't heard it from politicians.

I haven't heard it from anybody. No one even uses the phrase. It's on our money, I check. It is still on our money. It's the unofficial motto of our country put on the great seal of the United States back in 1782.

And yet, we hardly ever hear it anymore. Democracy works, and our motto is realized only when we live out what we say we believe.

[2:55] that all people are created equal. That all people are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Are we living it out? Because I don't think we've done it very well. And thank God, we're improving. I believe that. But I suggest failure was always in the cards from the very moment we said it.

Why? Because democracy is a system run by fallen people, sinful people, who when pushed, seek their own interests rather than the interests of others.

Democracy by itself can't do it. It's flawed. It's broken. Democracy needs the gospel of the kingdom of God, which is greater than democracy.

You see, unity and diversity, unity, this unity, the hope of the world, not democracy, is only found in the gospel.

[4:09] But family, I gotta tell you, it has to begin and be more practice in the church. Democracy can only work if the church works.

So while we import, we export democracy to other places, if the gospel doesn't go with it, we're exporting failure.

Better failure than other sisters, maybe, but still failure. Because you need, as some writers have said, a religious people.

And I think by that, they meant the people who believe the word of God, who believe that Christ was everything in order for something like democracy to even hopefully happen.

As you saw last Sunday, kingdom unity is more than racial reconciliation, but not less. The unity of Christ's church covers all manner of human diversity and even division.

[5:21] Political, socioeconomic, national, language, cultural, tribal, gender, by gender, I mean male, female. Much of this diversity is not wrong. poverty certainly is, but other forms of diversity are not wrong.

But it all takes on sinful proportions when allowed to divide the body of Christ, keeping us from reaching our God-given potential as an embassy of the kingdom of God.

You see, our unity is essential to our identity. Colossians 3.11, Paul says here there is no, there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and in all.

That's our identity. Christ in each one of us, no matter where we're from, each one of us are indwelt by the spirit of the living Christ.

And when we come together, there should be excitement. and friction. Last time we saw that our unity is empowered by and modeled on that of the Holy Trinity.

[6:38] The Father sends the Son. The Son takes on our humanity and is excluded that we might be included.

That's what the cross is. The cross is the Son of God being excluded for His people so that we might once again go back to even beyond Genesis, that we might return to God and be His people once again.

That's good news. That's really good news. The very nature of God is imaged in our unity and diversity.

It's supernatural. It's real. It can't be stopped. But it can look weird because we don't trust Him.

Let me go on. Point three. Kingdom unity is full of Christ's glory. Verse 22 is a really powerful statement that's interesting. He says, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them that they may be one even as we are one.

[7:53] Now this, again, somewhat Trinitarian here, but once again we return to where we began in this prayer. We return to Jesus talking about His glory.

He began the petition calling the Father to restore Him to glory and we know what that meant. That meant to the visible manifestation of His deity that He had with the Father before eternity passed, even existed, whatever.

It's the glory that was seen on the Mount of Transfiguration and Peter talks about that in 2 Peter 1.

He talks about seeing. He says, listen, I'm not making this stuff up. I didn't hear about this.

I'm not talking fantasy or fable. I saw His glory on the Mount. I saw the manifestation when God, as it were, pulled back the veil and showed Peter, James, and John the magnificent splendor of Jesus and the Father spoke from heaven saying, this is my beloved son.

Listen to him. Blew their minds. And they couldn't tell anybody about it until after He was resurrected.

[9:11] But I don't think the Lord is speaking of that glory here. That's the glory of His deity. We don't share that kind of glory.

Though we will be glorified and there will be some sense, but I don't think that's what He's talking here. Here's another aspect of His glory that John has been showing us. It's the glory that we can share, a glory that was given Him by the Father while He was with us.

And by the way, sharing this story, he says, brings oneness. What is that glory? Remember, throughout John, the Father has glorified Jesus by His powerful presence in His words and works, thus showing Jesus to be His one of a kind or unique or, the King James says, only begotten Son. You see this glory in what Christ said and did, okay? But also, you notice that Jesus, as it gets near the end, starts pointing to the cross and the cross will be the manifestation of His glory.

That place there. So, the revelation of God's power and reality and presence in His words and works, but also His glory is seen at the cross.

[10:50] Here's what I think. You can take this for what it's worth to you. I think that's the glory Jesus is talking about that He gives us. The glory that God is with us in our words and works.

He is with us especially when we suffer for His name. there you see the glory of Christ among us.

When His people speak in His name, His word to the nations and to one another. When His people go about doing the greater works that Jesus said we would do.

Greater works in His, He said. And when His people, I can't remember saying people, that's plural. When His people together in His name face all manner of suffering and attack together in unity.

You see, that's how God reveals Himself among us. That's how He pushes us together as it were. He helps, you know, I've never served in the armed services and respect those of you who have and any of you have been in combat.

[12 : 11] You especially have my esteem. Thank God for you. But it's nothing like being in a group of people under that kind of intense pressure shooting in the same direction.

It pulls you together. A band of brothers and sisters. I'm not a huge fan of women in combat. Sue me if you want to. I don't care what you think about that one.

That's why I feel. Sending my mothers and sisters out. I don't want anybody in combat actually except the spiritual war that we fight. But there's something about it though that binds people together.

The same is true for us. In this battle, in this spiritual war where the stakes are much higher than nation against nation. we are fighting for the souls of people.

You understand that? We're fighting for the souls of people. Their life now and into eternity and eternity is much longer than you will live now. You may live to be a hundred.

[13 : 21] That's a drop. That's not even a drop in the bucket for eternity. We're fighting for eternity brothers and sisters that people would know Christ and be brought to God and live with him forever and ever in glory.

That's what we're fighting for. The stakes are much higher. And in this cause, the church, we will face hardship.

Suffering caused by the world and the enemy but also suffering caused by working through our painful and emotional disagreements in the body.

As we work through these things, as we work through those areas where you feel hurt and I feel hurt and yet we're working it through it, we're coming together.

That's painful. That can be really difficult. But listen, family, as we work through those things and unite and hold and see something greater in each other than our particular need or cause, when we see Christ in each other and work through the pain of disagreements in the body, I guarantee you, there, you see the glory of Christ.

[14 : 53] You see the majesty of Jesus. Don't you understand? The New Testament brought together Jew and Gentile. We try to make that racial thing.

It's much more than that. It's bigger than black and white or black and Latino or white and Asian. It's much bigger than that. It can be applied there and has hope for that but it's much bigger.

The whole world was divided. The Roman world was a place of great division. Sounds kind of familiar actually to me but divided between Jew and Gentile where the Jews are the people of God and the Gentiles are not the people of God.

That's really the issue. Who are the people of God? Who get to call God their God and thus reign and live in him forever and who do not?

The Jews said the Gentiles and that was the rest of the world y'all. Out! Not you! Not those people!

[15 : 58] Not those pig feet eating crab crunching folk that has me all the way. None of them!

Just us! Just us! And the Gentiles looked at Jews and said y'all some crazy folk! Y'all weird! Y'all God invisible! We don't like you! You think you are morally superior to us?

Conquer them! And they did! Conquer them! Left and right! And then the gospel comes and God says to the Jews unless you repent you will not see the kingdom of heaven.

Receive my son accept your savior the one who you said was crucified the one whom the one whom you are ashamed of because he was crucified. Accept him! Trust in him alone and you will be saved!

Otherwise Moses can't help you! And then he said to the Gentiles all your gods are whack! All that crazy stuff you worship him and the Americans worship today money power love so called all that stuff y'all worship it's all whack!

[17 : 10] The false gods that can't save you! You need to trust in my son and believe in him only and you will be saved and I will welcome you I will forgive you of all your sins as he said to the Gentiles and then he said to both of them and guess what now you're family!

Amen! Ephesians 3 calls that the mystery of the gospel read it for yourself read 2 and 3 by the way the mystery of the gospel and and and and that's what boom and God is doing it he did it and is doing it and we're living it out as as Jew and Gentile and Gentiles of all sorts because we come from all kinds of places y'all are brought together in this one Christ that we may be his and his alone

and and and and bringing us together just like Jew and Gentile there was friction there was confusion there was people were upset you gotta keep the law if you wanna be with us no no we don't wanna keep that law I like my pig feet you know there was all the new the new testament church they were doing this left and right that's why we have the epistles because the new they were doing this why because though they were saved they were still sinners but they were not slaves to sin and so therefore they were able now to live in a way that honors Christ and make decisions to choose God's way but because of their fallen humanity they still struggled and by the way when Paul talks about us being in the flesh that's talking about us still having issues with sin and part of the issues with sin is I like my tribe and you like your tribe

I like my people is that me buzzing or somebody else oh that's me oh that's me oh better get a doctor that's my glucose levels up a little high I feel great though I feel fine it's telling me boy what are you doing but listen and see what happens is my kingdom bumps up against your kingdom my kingdom come you say no my kingdom come and we get friction that happens in the church and when we work through it when you write something online that offends me because you thought you were standing for truth but what you did was punch me in the face and I'm your brother now what do I do I come to you and say brother I don't know Willie I'm picking on Willie because Willie and I are cool I say Willie man why did you man what you wrote bro why did you say that man that really hurt me man now if I walk if I don't say anything to Willie and walk around all stewing and upset and mad and leaving the church and leaving people see that there's no glory there there's no glory it's even more pronounced when it's Derek because he white y'all didn't know that but Derek white

I'm a little darker than Derek and me and Derek are really cool too so just so you know it gets even more pronounced when me and Derek have that kind of situation and we were because the culture says it can't happen the culture says well maybe it can't happen but maybe it can't I mean the culture goes back and forth on racial issues right the worst thing you could be called today is a racist it's one of the worst things it's one of them and so when they see us working it out they go oh that's interesting they don't believe it but we're doing it now we're working it through why why are we talking why why am I exposing myself admitting I'm hurt ooh I admitted I was hurt ooh that's not very strong is it I admitted I was hurt how can I do that how can I admit I'm hurt Sarge how can I do it I tell you how I can do it because my identity is in Christ and what you think of me is not the first thing on my mind it is important but not the first thing is what he thinks of me is how can I honor him and if honor him is abasing myself before you then so be it you see our identity is trapped in the wrong place when your identity is trapped in your ethnic background your socioeconomic standing your coolness of course some of us do have it and some don't you know but when your identity is trapped in anything other than Jesus you have to defend our identity you gotta fight for it you gotta defend it and you're afraid to lose it but see when your identity is in Christ you know who you are in Jesus you are saved sanctified and filled you're his you belong to him he rejoices over you with singing he accepts you as his own will never turn his back on you will never let you go even when you face plant in your sin he will pick you up and say

I love you now let's go when your identity is in him oh you can take anything you can take anything from anybody else and their opinion of you their like or dislike on you on social media or whatever doesn't destroy you see when we work through these things in the church knowing our identity is in Christ he is in us we are in him he's been saying that in a prayer we can work through our problems we can work through our disagreements we can work through things that are really important to us political stances ethnic identities I can work through them with you and listen listen to this we may not fully agree on those issues ever in this life but we agree on what's most important we agree on what keeps us together we agree on where our identity really is we agree that Jesus is Lord he's our savior he's that means you're my brother or my sister and we are together forever you see that's where you see the glory of Jesus that's where you see the majesty of Jesus being revealed when his people stop allowing disagreements to become divisions and now we're on the outs division is on the out we get confused here and we fail here

[24:11] I think because we end up going you know I'm told you know that even soldiers get leave right they get leave they can go home for a little while and come but they have to go back right if you don't go back it's called what AWOL what's that mean again away without official leave no where there was nobody above you gave you permission to stay to be gone you you overstayed you're welcome here's what I think happens as Christians we go on extended leave and when we do we allow those divisions to become too important sorry the disagreements to become too

important to us and they become divisions let me show you what Paul says 2 Timothy 2:3 and 4 sharing suffering as a good soldier of

Christ Jesus no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him when soldiers get involved in civilian life they no longer have the priority of being soldiers they're supposed to be on duty they're supposed to be ready to go to battle but they're tied up in civilian stuff they're tied up in you know drama at home and so now they are distracted from the fight and he's telling us as Christians we have to be careful that we don't go AWOL or that we don't get distracted by the things around us in the world we have to acknowledge the things around us can't ignore them God is calling us to be in the world but not of the world amen so we can't ignore those things but we can't allow them to distract us because once they distract us from Christ from our union in Christ from our unity in Christ from the reality of the kingdom of heaven now in us in this world we get distracted from reality actually what happens is then we find ourselves my kingdom come versus your kingdom come my will be done versus your will be done and we see this throughout our churches and splits and divisions fights court battles

I was in my early Christian as a baby believer my church went through a court fight with another congregation and I'm sitting in court as a 17-18 year old watching the people of God fight one another in court over the church building who was going to forget it the bishop's kid or the current of the other bishop Lenardi was the most I didn't know much but I knew that was wrong it was horrible Paul even talks about that taking believers to courts he warns us about doing that and that we do it because we are getting caught up in civilian affairs now let me end this and point to this last thing because it goes right naturally into it kingdom unity exists for the sake of the mission see we talk a lot about personal evangelism and we should and we should but we forget about corporate evangelism

Jesus in this passage is talking about our corporate witness as the body of Christ and listen he says it twice so you know it's important first of all verse 21 B so that the world may believe that you have sent me verse 23 B that so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me he says it twice that this unity that he's talking about here that we will be one as he is one that we will become perfectly one all of that is so that the world would see his reality that the world would see his mission that the father really sent him to be the savior of the world sent by the father that's what he wants them to know that his words he said it in John are the father's words our unity when people come to

New City Fellowship or they come into any church what do they see about the body yeah what we say is important oh yes we got to preach the word of God we got to preach the gospel most definitely but how we live together either says the father sent the son or denies that this is huge this is not a minor thing family this a man stopped me I think two Mondays ago one of my neighbors he's a neat guy he cuts grass and he'll see me hey pastor how you doing I say hey I don't even know his name I forget names so easily he stopped me the other week and said you know something pastor your church looks the way your churches should look he never I've been here 14 years I don't think he's ever been here in the 14 years

[30:13] I've been here he's never been in this building but he sees us are you listening he sees us he sees people come in these doors he sees how when you get out the parking lot he sees you he's not the only one that sees us a whole neighborhood sees us and they see all churches and they're watching us and they're looking and they're saying you know you know they're looking for community they're looking for a community that will where they can be known and loved it's hard to find community now because we spend so much time online that we don't know how to even talk to each other face to face anymore so we get offline and go talk to somebody have a cup of coffee have a power drink I don't know whatever people drink together they're looking Jesus says how we love each other how we because this involves love you know that right because he says that they would know that you love me even as you love them there's a love thing going on here that is a divine love being realized among us he says the father loves you like he loves me

I don't know what listen that's above my pay grade y'all because I can't get my head around that one but I know what it means I know it means because we are in Christ we experience the same love that Jesus experiences because we are spiritually joined to Jesus we experience the father's love like Christ experiences the father love wow hallelujah thank you that love's eternal that love won't go away that love raised Christ from the dead and will raise you from the dead when the time comes that love welcome Jesus into glory and will welcome you into glory when you close your

eyes on this side of glory that some real kind of love there that love is seen among us as we are together are living out the mission of Christ then the world says they've got something we don't have listen the UN can't get it they tried

God bless their heart they trying NATO can't get it trying bless their hearts all other kinds of unions among nations all kinds of groups in our country are trying to unite people and I'm grateful for that by the way I think they're trying people are trying amen give them props for trying but it's going to fail because true unity only comes when you know God because you got to be right with him first you see you can't be unified with somebody else if you are in turmoil in here if you don't know who you are if you're confused if you are all kinds of turmoil and ambitions that crush other people and self centric and selfishness and if you are tied up inside with addictions and all kinds of stuff and trying to do life all by yourself I don't need God see you're a mess you can't you can't be unified with anybody else don't get married like that but listen once you're right with

God see now you're at peace with him the war is over and now he's beginning to work on you and mold and shape you and make you a new creation and do something in you now you're in a place where you can be unified with other people now you're in a place where you can connect with other people who are doing the same thing that's the church and the world will see that and go listen the world will see that and the world should see that and go they've got something we don't have why are all those people so different and yet they love each other and it's so obvious they love each other they care for each other can I ask you a question how many of you how many of you ever go to work and people ask you how you doing you ever talk about how your church loved on you you ever talk about how in your small group people really cared for you you ever talk about how people at church somebody at church showed you a great kindness why are we bragging on the body bragging your favorite sports team you go roll tide and you're not even playing you in this game at least you at least in this game why aren't we bragging and telling the world about the love we are experiencing in the body of Christ now if you're standing on the fringe of the body if you just show up and go home see you you're keeping yourself out of it come on in the water's fine come on in just come on in say hello my name is so and so reach out to people let them know you love them go to dinner like me love you and talk about these things the world is hurting for what we have and Jesus is telling us that's this unity will tell the world

I'm gonna use my words that I'm real that I'm not joking that the father sent me and it's nothing more serious than that family we have all we need we are in Christ we've been united in him I'd like to end I want to say one thing and I want you to understand how serious this is how division within the body dishonors Christ it hurts our witness but it doesn't but he doesn't like it and it's in first and these words they scare me actually and I had to pray through them first Corinthians in first Corinthians Paul is talking about this chapter three and he's talking about division in the church division in the Corinthian church was a very divided church they had

[36 : 48] I mean they were just going through some stuff but God still loved them he didn't kick them out but here's what he said to the agitators to ones causing the division this is I'm not making this up this is in the Bible you can be mad at me don't be mad at me talk to God about it do you not know that you are God's temple that's collective and that God's spirit dwells in you he's talking collectively if anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy him for God's temple is holy and you are that temple we're not really sure what destroy means but it's not enjoyable he's talking to a church that was experiencing all this division and they were tearing each other apart and he writes them and says listen I love you God loves you but if you whoever you are if you're causing division in the body he says

God will destroy you now listen saints I I just I had to show you that because I want you to understand this is serious disagreements are one thing we all disagree we can but don't let our disagreements become divisions search your own heart see we gotta humble ourselves before each other and say hold there I disagree with you but let me check my heart first let me check why am I so upset here what's driving me why am I so angry we can work through that that's normal y'all are you listening that's normal Christian living you can leave the church and go somewhere else and you gonna find it there too it's normal Christian living matter of fact it's an opportunity for Christ to be glorified search your own hearts ask and humble yourself before him and one another and then come together see he's being glorified but if you hardline and it's my way or the highway I'm praying for you I'm praying for you because God because God's not playing how about a few applications again as we go Jamie Dunlap in his book love the ones who drive you crazy the

differences and disagreements that threaten to tear your church apart are filled with potential to proclaim the glory of our good and gracious God potential we must speak listen man we must this is end quote we must speak the same mind concerning the gospel and the essentials but in the non essentials where we differ and the world divides by we we must remain committed to each other and the non essentials we can we can we can disagree it's okay we must be committed to each other and in that way we show that there's something more gloriously important

Jesus says in this passage he's not praying for the world do you remember that verse nine he's not praying for the world what does that tell us but he prays for his church's unity he's not praying for the world's unity he's praying for the church's unity which means the church's unity is more important to Jesus than the world's unity it's worth fighting for y'all with the weapons of righteousness it's worth humbling ourselves for it's worth crying for it's worth trying again and again it's worth listening and trying to understand my brother's perspective it's worth admitting I might be wrong here it's worth I'm not talking about the essentials

I'm talking about my opinions here it's worth it my political opinions my sociological opinions my ethnic opinions it's worth listen this this unity in Christ it's worth saying hold it I may be a little wrong about those things I mean to rethink some of those things I may have to let me correct it's worth that the unity and the protection of the church is more important to Jesus than the unity of the nations he'll take care of that when he comes doesn't mean we shouldn't work for the unity of the name doesn't mean we shouldn't give our efforts to peacemaking we're called blessed are the peacemakers doesn't mean we shouldn't do that we should do that amen all I'm saying to you is that Jesus didn't pray for that he prayed for the unity of in the peace of his church that's what he prayed for and he made it clear that he wasn't praying for the!

[42:22] he died that we might have it he rose again in the power of the spirit that we might have the power to achieve it he prayed for us the father heard him he gave it to us now we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling before God for we for God is at work in us to be unified I'm paraphrasing to be unified for his good pleasure to do it his way amen father thank you thank you for loving us enough that you made us family you put us in one family you didn't put us in two families you put us in one family old covenant saints new covenant saints Jew and Gentile who believe in Jesus we're all one big family

Abraham is mine David is mine Paul is mine we belong Augustine is mine Luther and Calvin mine everyone in this room who belongs to you is mine and I'm theirs we're family forgive us oh lord for where we have allowed differences and disagreements to become divisions forgive us cleanse us from unrighteousness and help us lord even though we may agree to disagree help us to agree that we're family and that we love each other in Jesus and that he's everything to us help us to humble ourselves and seek not only our own interests but the interests of our brothers and sisters help us to esteem one another as more important than ourselves because

Jesus is everything and he did just that for us he esteemed us more important than himself and he looked not just for his own interests but for our interests that we might know life if we belong to him we have all the power we need to live in this way help us help us in Jesus name amen