

03-29-15

Series: [The Anatomy of a Church](#)

The Anatomy of a Church (53)

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 03/22/15)

The Internal Systems-2

UNITY

Jesus Prays for All Believers—Part 1: That They Would Be Presently United in Truth ([John 17:20-23](#))

[John 17:20-23 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

The unity Christ prayed for is not an outward, organizational unity, but the inward, spiritual unity based on believers’ life in Christ. Because of their union with Jesus Christ—since “**the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him**” ([1 Cor. 6:17](#))—all believers are one with each other as well “**for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**” ([Gal. 3:28](#)). In the words of the **Westminster Confession of Faith**, “The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (25.1).

How does that spiritual unity manifest itself in practice? In [Philippians 2:2](#) Paul listed four marks of the unity that characterizes the true church.

[Philippians 2:2 \(NASB\)](#)

² “**Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.**”

First, unity results in believers “**being of the same mind.**” That does not mean that they share all the same likes and dislikes. Nor does it entail complete agreement on all the secondary doctrinal issues that godly men differ over. Rather, it signifies that true believers are controlled by a deep knowledge of the Word of Christ that is energized in them by the power of the Spirit (cf. [Col. 3:16](#)). Because they walk in the Spirit, they maintain the same spiritual attitude.

Colossians 3:16 (NASB)

¹⁶“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Second, unity results in believers “**maintaining the same love**”; that is, they love each other equally. That does not mean that they have the same emotional commitment to everyone, which is impossible. The love in view here is *agape* love, the love not of emotional attraction, but of **will and choice**. It is expressed when believers are “**devoted to one another in brotherly love; [and] give preference to one another in honor**” ([Rom. 12:10](#)). It has been “**poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us**” ([Rom. 5:5](#)).

Third, unity results in believers being “**united in spirit.**” The Greek word literally means “**one-souled.**” It refers to a passionate, common commitment to the same spiritual goals. By definition it excludes such divisive attitudes as personal ambition, selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and the countless other manifestations of the evil fruit of self-love.

Finally unity results in believers being “**intent on one purpose.**” Because they are of the same mind, love each other, and are united in spirit they have the same goal—advancing the kingdom of God. But believers can interrupt their spiritual unity by fleshly behavior and need to be exhorted to have “**one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel**” ([Phil. 1:27](#)).

But in our obsessively tolerant age, the opposite extreme poses a far more serious threat to true spiritual unity. In the name of love, many work hard to achieve a superficial, false, sinful unity that is broad enough to embrace false Christians and even those who deny the central truths of the Christian faith. Genuine biblical love, however, cannot be divorced from biblical truth “**but speaking the truth in love**” ([Eph. 4:15](#)).

Far from compromising it, God’s people are called to “**contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints**” ([Jude 3](#)). The true church of Jesus Christ cannot unite with those who deny the essential truths of the gospel ([2 John 7-11](#)), or who affirm a false gospel ([Gal. 1:6-9](#)). “**Do not be bound together with unbelievers,**” Paul commanded the Corinthians, “**for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?**” ([2 Cor. 6:14-15](#)). True unity is the reality among true Christians.

As He concluded His magnificent High Priestly Prayer, the unity of His followers was very much on the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having prayed for His glory ([John 17:1-5](#)) and for His disciples ([John 17:6-19](#)), the Savior expanded His prayer to include all future believers—those who would come to Him through the power of the Word ([John 17:17](#)), the witness of the disciples ([John 17:18](#)), and the sacrifice of the cross ([John 17:19](#)). The Lord made two requests on their behalf: that they would be united in the truth, and that they would be reunited with Him in eternal glory. The first of those requests is the subject of this chapter [John 17](#).

The Lord’s first request may be examined under four headings: **1) the root of true unity, 2) the request for true unity, 3) the representation of true unity, and 4) the result of true unity.**