

Walking Together

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Part 2 of 2

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I want to share with you one more passage about unity and love, and that is our Lord's prayer in John 17, his prayer to his Father before he went to be crucified. It is sometimes called Jesus' high priestly prayer, for Jesus was, as a priest, preparing the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself. He was also, as a priest, interceding for his people, both for his disciples and those who would believe through the disciples' testimony. As Jesus faced the worst agony imaginable — physical, mental, emotional, spiritual — he thought of us and prayed for us to the Father.

What did he ask the Father? Essentially, he asked that we would be one. Let me read the last part of this prayer: Jesus said,

“My prayer is not for them [the disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Remarkably, Jesus prayed that we would be one as he is one with the Father. That is hard to imagine. The Son and the Father are so perfectly one that they together are one being, one God. That's the doctrine of the Trinity. We cannot have that kind of unity, because we're not God. But we can *image* that unity, we can *reflect* that unity, for we are God's image, renewed in the image of Christ.

How can we reflect that unity? Well, we could reflect that unity by agreeing about everything. Certainly Jesus and his Father are of one mind; they agree on absolutely everything. But the passage does not emphasize agreement of ideas. Rather, it gives us three ways in which our unity can be like the wonderful, mysterious unity of the Trinity.

1. **The Father and Son *bring glory to one another.***

In the beginning of Jesus' prayer, he prayed,

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you."

Then in verses 4 and 5,

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

The Son has glorified the Father; now the Father will glorify him. We also read elsewhere that the Spirit brings glory to Christ. If we are to reflect the Trinity, we, like them, will glorify one another. Verse 22 tells us that Jesus "had [has] given them [us] the glory that you [the Father] gave me, that they may be one as we are one." There is a glory among us, like the glory in the Trinity itself. It boggles the mind, doesn't it? What does it mean, practically speaking?

To glorify is to adorn. A woman's hair is her crowning glory, says Paul; it adorns her, it makes her look wonderful. A woman is the glory of her husband — she makes him look good. When we glorify God in worship, we tell one another how wonderful, how beautiful God is. We adorn him with our praises. God's glory is that great light that shines out from him when he appears to men. When we glorify God in our lives, we make that light shine throughout the earth, so that like Jesus we ourselves are lights in the world.

Let us glorify each other. Let us make one another look good. We can do that by helping one another to deal with sin, by helping one another with problems, by praising one another, encouraging one another. Paul in Romans 16 glorified Phoebe when he said, “She has been a great help to many people, including me.” Do you glorify your brothers and sisters in Christ? Or are you, like me, sometimes tempted to put them down, to disparage their accomplishments, to injure their reputations ever so slightly, so you can make yourself look a little better by comparison? That’s what the strong believers were doing in Romans 14. But Jesus would never belittle the Father to honor himself, even though he deserved *supreme* honor. He humbled himself to do the Father’s will, to bring glory to Him. We need to humble ourselves, to glorify one another.

That should be true even in our corporate church life, in the way we relate to other churches, even churches of other denominations and traditions. As I said before, I’m against denominations, although for the moment we are stuck with them. It would be nice if we could say that all the true Christians in the world are in my denomination, but we know that’s not true. There are true Christians in many denominations throughout the world. Are we seeking to *glorify* them?

The rule in many churches is that we say mostly good things about our church or our denomination, and we say mostly bad things about other churches or denominations, especially those in other traditions. Now I know that sometimes to glorify a fellow Christian you must correct him. To glorify the Reformed Episcopal church, we will eventually have to set them straight on the principles of biblical church government. But how are we trying to do this? Through put downs? Through caustic, nasty criticism, hard-edged ridicule, peremptory condemnation? Or do we seek first to understand where our brothers are coming from, to recognize what is good in their ministry, and to correct them in such a way as to glorify the work of God in their ministry? Do we seek to correct them in such a way as to make them look good to the watching world?

If we are one as Jesus and the Father are one, we will *glorify* one another.

2. We can image the Trinity by *servicing* one another.

Jesus’ prayer in John 17 is more like a report than a series of requests. It is interesting that when Jesus faced the cross, he spent much

more time opening his heart to the Father, telling the Father what he had done, than he did in asking for things. We should think about that as we develop priorities in our own prayer lives. Jesus' report is that the Father gave him a task, and he carried it out fully. He didn't spare himself any suffering, any misery. The cup of death for sin could not pass from him. He would take that awful cup of God's wrath and drink it down to the dregs.

Jesus revealed the Father to the people God had given him, and he protected them and kept them safe. Not one was lost except Judas the betrayer, that Scripture might be fulfilled. He brought them into the love of the Father and the Son.

Over and over in the gospels, Jesus says that he came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father. His own will was perfect. Had he done his own will, his own will alone, he would still have lived a perfect life. And of course his own will was one with the will of the Father, so we wonder why he should make the negative contrast "not my will, but yours." But Jesus teaches us here that in his time on earth, his time of humiliation, he comes as a Servant, the Servant prophesied in Isaiah 53, for example. As God, he is Lord; as man, he is Servant. He lives the life of service that Adam should have lived. Whereas Adam and all of us have disobeyed the Father, Jesus obeyed. For our salvation, it's important not only that Jesus be God, but that he also be a Servant, a perfect man, able to offer himself in sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus had the right to be Lord, the right to have everyone bow to him. But he came into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

When Jesus said that, he was teaching his disciples how to relate to one another, how to be servants themselves. James and John, with their mother's support, wanted to be rulers in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus said no:

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44).

As Jesus came to serve, we are to serve one another. Over and over the New Testament stresses this. The great song of Philippians 2, showing the humiliation and exaltation of Christ, is to show Christians how to get along:

“Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus”; “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”

3. Glorifying one another, serving one another, and, finally, *loving* one another.

The Father glorified the Son, because he *loved* him before the creation of the world (John 17:24). It is that *love* that Jesus wants to see in his disciples. In the last verse of our passage, he says to the Father,

“I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (verse 26).

Love is that attitude of heart that motivates us to glorify and serve one another. And love is the very heart of the Christian life. The two greatest commandments are the commandments to love God with all our heart and our neighbors as ourselves. The new commandment Jesus gives to his disciples is that they should love one another as he has loved them. Make no mistake, Scripture defines love by nothing less than the Cross. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10). We hesitate before this holy ground. We can imagine imitating Christ in many ways — but can we possibly imitate his atonement? Surely I can’t die for anyone’s sins! But yes; our love is to imitate Christ precisely as he dies for our sins. That’s the case in Philippians 2, John 3:16, and many other passages:

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Love is greater than all spiritual gifts, Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 13, and without love everything is worthless. Tradition tells us of the old apostle John, hardly able any longer to speak, standing in the assembly with assistance, to say, “Little children, love one another.”

Our theologies talk about the marks of the church, but love is the mark Jesus mentioned, the mark that identifies us before the world as

Christ's disciples. Love in the church glorifies God, and it benefits us, but it is also a witness to the world, as Jesus said in John 17:21,23. In the first centuries, the pagans noticed that love. It stuck out. How those Christians loved one another! Today, the pagans tend to notice other things about us: the division, the splintering, the quarrelsome spirit. We need to learn again to love one another as Christ has loved us. We need to learn what it means to lay down our lives for one another.

The world will be watching you, as believers, and as members of a new Baptist conference. How will they think of you? As another bunch of feuding fundamentalists? As a group that gathers to congratulate itself and to put down the Christians outside the fold? Or will they be amazed at the love you have for one another, and for other Christians, and for the lost? Will they remark about how you selflessly strive to bear one another's burdens, even making major sacrifices? Will they be surprised at how much you glorify one another and the rest of the church? How you give credit to others, make others look better? How much you serve one another, and the depth of your love for one another? If so, you'll have a fellowship that reflects the very Trinity, God himself, Father, Son, and Spirit. Isn't that wonderful? To him be all the glory! Amen.