

### Exegesis

**Vs. 20-21** – Jesus begins to pray for a new group. He says, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

Jesus not only prayed “for these alone,” a reference to his *present* disciples—i.e., the apostles (see notes, vs. 6-8) but “for them also which shall believe on me through their word,” a reference to all *future* disciples (cf. 10:16). As Jesus focused on the eleven because they had “kept [God's] word” (vs. 6), so now he focuses on every Christian who comes to “believe on [him] through [the disciples'] word.” Thus, another key component has been added to the transmission order: from *the Father to the Son to the original believers to all new believers* (see notes, vs. 14-16). This means Christ's word wasn't the only thing equated with God's word. The apostles' word is also considered divine. In other words, the apostolic writings in the N.T. (e.g., the gospels, Romans, Peter's epistles, etc.) are no less inspired than the historic, poetic, and prophetic writings in the O.T. (e.g., Genesis, Proverbs, Isaiah, etc.).

Additionally, the *oneness* that the first disciples experienced with the Triune God (cf. vs. 11) back in the first century is the *same fellowship* that all Christians can experience in every age. This is why the Lord prays “that they [future believers] all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.” So long as believers *continue* in the apostle's word (cf. Gal. 1:6-9), they will *remain* unified with God.

This is not to say that Christians will not find cause for some disagreement and even institutional separation (e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Global Methodist, etc.). The multiplicity of denominations within Protestantism does *not* indicate that the church is divided, though, obviously, it can be, and we must guard against this tendency (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13). Like branches on a tree, faith traditions can diverge yet still be a part of the *same faith*. And often, good denominations will part ways over important issues (e.g., ecclesiology, ordinances, spiritual gifts, etc.).<sup>1</sup> But even those who disagree about secondary doctrines can enjoy fellowship with one another over those doctrines that are primary (e.g., scriptural infallibility, Christology, soteriology, etc.). Only when a tradition abandons the core claims of Christianity does it leave the faith (e.g., Jehovah's Witness, Mormonism, Catholicism, United Methodist,

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<sup>1</sup> In such cases, the principle of Mark 9:38-41 ought to apply.

etc.). Read *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* by Dr. Gavin Ortlund for more on this.

Jesus Christ commissioned people like Peter, Matthew, John, and so on to carry on his work and word (cf. 15:27; Ac. 1:8). And just as the Son of God gave to others what was first given to him (cf. vs. 8), preachers like Paul were supposed to pass on to others what was first passed down to them (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-11). This means a pastor is nothing more than a *steward* of the Scriptures. Faithfully preaching God's word is the under shepherd's *chief* function (cf. Ac. 6:4; 2 Tim. 4:1-2). As such, he either feeds God's flock with God's word (cf. 21:15-17) or the sheep are left to starve; or worse, they're led astray (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4). Apostasy, which is the total abandonment of Christian orthodoxy (cf. 1 Jn. 2:19), occurs when so-called "teachers" of God's word teach something not found in God's word (cf. Mat. 24:10; 2 Thess. 2:3). Rather than being proponents of *the* Gospel they're counterfeit shepherds, selling a counterfeit gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13). This is not to say that pastors will not make mistakes in the pulpit. But a pastor most assuredly strays far from his calling when he brings anything but God's word into the pulpit. He has only done his job when he can confidently say, "Thus says the Lord," or else he has failed.

All good sermons make the Father known via the Scriptures. For only when a person knows "the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom [the Father] hast sent," can they know they have "life eternal" (vs. 3; cf. 20:30-31; 1 Jn. 5:13). Failing to unpack the Bible, as the Bible has been written, locks away the key to salvation itself (cf. Lu. 11:52-54). In contrast, preaching that agrees with the Old and New Testament ensures that the Church, past, present, and future, is made "wise unto salvation, through the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Therefore, in verse 21, the Lord places his mark of approval on the apostles' ministry just as the Father had done to him on the Mount of Transfiguration. As God declared, "This is my beloved Son: hear him," (Lu. 9:35), the Son declares to Christians of every age, "These are my beloved disciples: *here them*." And any preacher worth his salt will not add or take away from the Word, just as every true believer will want nothing more or less than the Word.

Moreover, believers are unified with God through the apostle's word for a *purpose*: "that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (cf. 11:42). The gospel message is the great unifier of all professing Christians. Though they may speak different languages and even live during different times, a disciple finds common ground with *every person* who believes the Bible. This shared understanding is a *powerful* and *compelling* witness to a world that is characterized by division.<sup>2</sup> Though they may speak similar languages and share the same resources, countries

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<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 498.

will war amongst themselves. Such disunity ought not to characterize the church. And, when it does, it means she's become cannibalistic (cf. Gal. 5:13-15), arguably the worst version of herself. Christianity is at her best when she is a cross-cultural movement characterized by Christ-like love, selflessness, and generosity. Such a coalition is beautiful in a profoundly polarized world. For believers, the common denominator is no longer one's ethnicity, status, or even gender but *Christ*. As Paul put it in Gal. 3:27-28, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Only when the unsaved see believers of diverse backgrounds loving each other, as Christ loved them, will they see Christ (cf. 13:34-35).

Though to be clear, this is a love rooted in the Scriptures; not all that is called "love" is love.<sup>3</sup> Unity is the most powerful evangelistic tool at the church's disposal, but unity is not an end in itself.<sup>4</sup> The unity the Lord is speaking about is based on God's triune *nature*. Their oneness is analogous to our fellowship with God.<sup>5</sup> As the Father, the Son, and the Spirit agree, believers must align themselves with God's name and character as conveyed through God's word. Those who deny the truths of the Bible, living in an ungodly and unrepentant lifestyle, cannot be (and should not be) a part of God's faith community (cf. Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 11; 2 Cor. 2:5-11).

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<sup>3</sup> Carson (1991), p. 568, "This is not simply a 'unity of love'. It is a unity predicated on adherence to the revelation the Father mediated to the first disciples through his Son, the revelation they accepted (vv. 6, 8) and then passed on ('those who will believe in me *through their message [author's emphasis]*', vs. 20)."

<sup>4</sup> Klink (2016), p. 723.

<sup>5</sup> Morris (1995), p. 649.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

### **Deep Dive: The Gospel of John | Week 75 | John 17:20-21**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

Today, the Lord will move from praying for the *first* disciples to praying for his *future* disciples. This implies that, despite his impending crucifixion, Christ's work will continue and that his followers will *increase* in number. And as with any large group of people, harmony and fellowship are a genuine concern. This is why, determined that the Church remain unified, Jesus will ask that whoever believes the apostles' word would "be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." In other words, so long as believers *continue* in the apostle's word (cf. Gal. 1:6-9), they will *continue* to be unified with God.

The gospel message is the great unifier of all professing Christians. Though they may speak different languages and even live during different times, a disciple finds common ground with *every person* who believes the Bible. This shared understanding is a *powerful* and *compelling* witness to a world characterized by division. Christianity is at its best when it is a cross-cultural movement characterized by Christ-like love, selflessness, and generosity. Such a coalition is beautiful in a profoundly polarized world.

**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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