



## First Baptist Church At The Villages

COMPANION LESSON TO THE MESSAGE "BETTER TOGETHER" (6/14) •  
LESSON TITLE: UNITY IN THE CHURCH • JOHN 17:20-26 & EPHESIANS 2:11-22 •  
FOR USE 6/14/ THROUGH 6/20/2020

### MAIN POINT

Unity among Christians gives a common witness to the world and is faithful stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.

### INTRODUCTION

As your study time begins, use this section to focus your mind and heart on the lesson.

**What are some groups or places in which you have a strong sense of community?  
(Ex: alma mater, favorite team, town, family, clubs or civic organizations, etc.)**

**What about those groups makes it so easy for people to connect?**

**Do you think it's easier or more difficult for people to connect to a church than it is to connect to other groups? Why?**

The church is unlike any other organization or group in history because it brings together people across ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, the unity of the church is one of the most powerful witnesses we have as to the power of the gospel.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.

| READ JOHN 17:20-26.

**What is the central theme of Jesus' prayer in these verses?**

Jesus prayed for believers' oneness with God (vv. 21-23); by believers' unity the world will know God sent Jesus (v. 23); God loves believers just as God loves His Son (v. 23); believers will be with Jesus and see His glory (v. 24); God's love is to be in believers (v. 26). Jesus asked the Father that all future believers be one in the same way the Father was in the Son and the Son was in the Father. When Christian fellowships are divided today, people may wonder whether Jesus' prayer was practical or powerful.

**If all you knew about unity was based on these verses, how would you define Christian unity?**

**What is the result of unity among believers?**

**How can believers apply the truths from these verses as an individual? As a group? As a church?**

Jesus' high priestly prayer shows His deep concern for unity among His followers. Unity is not sameness. Unity does not mean holding the same opinions and agreeing on every matter. Unity among Christians means loving one another with Jesus' love, obeying His commands, and working together in His redemptive mission. Love for Jesus, faithfulness to Him, and a sense of needing one another to do His work will unite His people for maximum effort for Him. In Ephesians 2-3, Paul speaks about the purpose of the church and cooperation among all types of believers.

| READ EPHESIANS 2:11-18.

**Before Jesus came, what problems did the Gentiles face (vv. 11-12)? How do those images compare to your personal history?**

**What are the main issues that keep various groups separated in today's churches?**

**What is the change that results because of the "But now" statement in 2:13? What does this statement mean to you?**

Paul wrote that Gentiles, who had once been separated from God and excluded from His covenant people, had now been brought into God's new people—the church—through the death of Jesus. Today, we are called to recognize that at conversion we have been brought into God's family. As a result, we have enormous privileges.

**How has Christ destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people (v. 14)?**

**According to verses 14-18, what are the positive results of this wall coming down?  
Which one is the most significant to you and why?**

The subject of Paul's message in verses 11-18 is that through His death Jesus "tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14) between believing Jews and Gentiles, causing them to be at peace with one another as one new people of God. This happened because when Christ came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near. As a result, unity (v. 14) and peace (v. 16) are possible in our relationships with others, and we all have access to the Holy Spirit's power (v. 18).

| READ EPHESIANS 2:19-22.

Christ achieved and announced peace. Now we see the result of that peace. Gentile believers have become citizens of God's kingdom. Paul used additional descriptions to speak about how we are to understand our relationship to other believers.

**What three images did Paul use to help believers understand their unity in Christ?  
Which of Paul's analogies best helps you understand your relationship to other  
believers? Why?**

**How do we express that we are part of God's earthly dwelling place? How can we  
positively express our connection with other Christians and churches?**

**How would we relate to others in the church if we truly recognized that God's Spirit  
was present? What are the implications of this reality?**

As Paul concluded this section of his letter, he emphasized the ongoing process by which Jesus is building His church. God dwells in each believer by His Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and thus collectively in the church as the assembly of all believers (1 Cor. 3:16). Nothing gives more significance to the church than the fact of God's residing in His people. He does not dwell in buildings; rather His people are His temple. God desires that you live out your spiritual commitment and fulfill Christ's divine plan.

## CONTEMPLATION & APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to your life.

**How are you encouraged by Jesus' prayer for the church? How does it affect the way  
you will personally approach prayer?**

**What will you do this week to relate to other believers in ways that express your unity in Christ?**

**In our post-COVID-19 world, what are some of the unique challenges we face as we practice biblical community? How can we respond to these challenges?**

## PRAYER

Spend some time thanking God for Jesus' intercessory prayers on our behalf. Thank Him for the hope and common witness we share with all believers of all generations. Pray that God would open our hearts to truly understand what it means to be unified with all Christians in the church. Pray that He would break down any walls we have built up toward other believers, that we might be a united witness to a lost world.

## BIBLE COMMENTARY

| JOHN 17:20-26

17:20-21. If we had any doubt that this prayer applies to believers today, it is erased by verse 20. The heart of this final paragraph of the chapter focuses on unity—the ultimate demonstration of God's work through his people in the world. We learn here that body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity. The union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or any well-meaning intentions of humanity. God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit because Jesus' blood is "thicker than water" and thicker than human bonds. Perhaps there is no verse in all of Scripture which has been more frequently quoted to support ecclesiastical church union than John 17:21. However, the emphasis of the prayer centers in spiritual unity, not organizational unity. It must be understood in the light of John 10:30, "I and my Father are one." If we are to understand the unity of the church, we must first understand unity between the Son and the Father.

17:22. Christian unity is facilitated by glory, first given to Christ and then in turn to the disciples. Glory in this context is not an absolute attribute of God but a relative possession that can be reassigned to believers. Some interpreters see heaven here, but there would be no point in such a futuristic view with respect to the mission statement of verse 23: "to let the world know that you sent me." Peter wrote that the divine nature was already in us as a result of regeneration, so we already have a measure of the glory of Jesus himself.

17:23. We also learn in this passage that body unity is a witness to the world. Like a set of matched mixing bowls, we are the smaller one that fits into Christ who fits into the Father. Purpose? To let the world know that you sent me. Mixing bowls may provide too mundane a metaphor here, but Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches in chapter 15 is affirmed by this prayer of chapter 17. The unity of believers calls forth a recognition of God's hand by observers in the world even while the church is on earth. Just a few hours before this prayer, Jesus told the disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:35).

17:24. Furthermore, body unity will be complete only in heaven. If the disciples listened to this prayer (which I believe they did), they may have remembered Jesus' teaching from chapter 14 as he promised them they would eventually arrive at the place where he was going. He wanted them to see him there. They had seen him scorned and hated on earth. Soon they would see him killed and buried. But they had never seen the splendor of heaven and his role as the Son of the Father. We see just a touch of humanity in this verse. Just as we invite our friends home to show them how hard we have worked to make it attractive and comfortable, so Jesus looked forward to the time when all his people would be in his Father's house. What a reminder that our Lord was always a pilgrim and stranger on earth. Now he prayed for guests to visit his eternal home. Notice also that heaven is heaven because of the presence of the Savior, not because of any other physical or material accoutrements. The glory of verse 24 seems different than what we saw in verse 22. Here believers observe it but do not partake in it personally, so we focus now on an attribute of deity. The glory and splendor that belong to Christ in heaven are a gift from his Father. This gift was motivated by love that the Father had before the foundation of the world. Before Adam, the Father loved the Son. This love will continue throughout all eternity so that believers may see its effects in the heavenly position afforded the Messiah.

17:25–26. Again we find the contrast between the world and disciples we saw in verses 9,14,16. The words Righteous Father in reference to God appear only here in the New Testament. They appeal to the justice of God. The world will be excluded from final glory because it has rejected the only means of grace. But the disciples, and all believers, live life with a divine viewpoint because they have known the incarnate God. The exegesis of the Father that occupied Christ's ministry is both complete and continuous. Complete in the sense that the incarnation demonstrated what God was like to those who would listen. Continuous in that it will go on as long as the world lasts. The impact of the latter part of the verse suggests that the very person of Christ lives in us. Through that inseparable union, we are recipients of divine love. The church of Jesus Christ dare not let the pagan society preempt its keynote theme of love. The love of God in the Son and consequently in the church marks Christians and enables them to reflect and communicate God's love.

