

Unity

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Unity can only be achieved through division.

Part 1

In the Gospel of John, chapter 17, Jesus prayed for His disciples, and all subsequent believers. Specifically, He said,

I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. [John 17:20-23, KJV]

But on the other hand, Matthew quotes Jesus as saying,

**Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn
“a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.” [Matthew 10:34-36, NIV]**

Does Jesus want unity or not? These two passages seem to be in contradiction.

When Bible passages are taken out of context, as I have just done, the Bible can be made to appear to contradict itself. But, if one studies the whole Bible, and earnestly wants to understand what the Bible is saying, all those apparent contradictions go away. The Bible is consistent in its message, and does not contradict itself.

So, how do we reconcile Jesus’ statements that He wants unity, but came to bring division? The short answer is that division can bring unity; but that short answer requires a long explanation.

In 1897, Ellen White wrote an excellent article titled “Christian Unity” for the *Review and Herald* Magazine which is as true today as it was more than 100 years ago. In it she applies Christ’s prayer to modern Christians.

Christ prayed for his disciples: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in

one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

In this prayer of Christ's, God has expressed his desire for the unity of his believing people. But there is an unwearied conflict kept up on this earth. Satan works to make the prayer of Christ of none effect. He makes a continual effort to create bitterness and discord; for he knows that where there is unity, there is strength,—a oneness which all the powers of hell cannot break. All who bring weakness and sorrow and discouragement upon God's people, by their own perverse ways and tempers, aid the enemy of God, and are working directly against the prayer of Christ.

...

In union there is strength; in disunion there is weakness. God's chosen ones are to reveal to the world their union one with another. It is not possible for a few to walk to heaven alone because they can agree with no others. God's people are to be a unit. If some entertain ideas so peculiar that others cannot accept them, they should compare notes in a teachable spirit, and all should be willing to learn. They should make the most strenuous efforts to be one, to come into the unity of the faith in the bonds of peace.

Our names are registered as Christians. We go to the Lord's table; we profess to be sons and daughters of God, members of the Lord's family, children of the Heavenly King. But too often those who claim to love Jesus, deny him by their lack of confidence in one another. Too often evil is watched for, actions are viewed in the worst light, words are misconstrued and misinterpreted. Many talk earnestly about the faults of others, but their own faults trouble them little. If they would devote their voices to the confession of their own sins, it would be better. God knows the ways of his children. Every word, every thought, every motive, is open before the eyes of him who sees all things. Then let us show that we love Jesus by enthroning him in our hearts, by denying self for the sake of others. Let us work together harmoniously, as staunch members of one family.

We must guard well every point; for Satan is unwearied in his work of temptation. Watch well your words; guard well the spirit that prompts your words. Stand as faithful sentinels over your own defective attributes of character, that you may do nothing which will prove a stumbling-block to your brother. Do not make crooked paths for your feet, paths that will turn his feet out of the way of life. I wish all to remember that a day is coming in which the case of every one will be revealed. Then the plague-spot that tainted your character, the rock of offense that wrecked your [ship], will be seen. Many will then realize that the tongue, though a little member, can do a weight of mischief. Many, eternally lost, will then, in their despair, look reproachfully upon those who sowed bitterness in their hearts, and planted suspicious thoughts in their minds.

No provision has been made for Christians to draw apart from one another. By our unity and love we are to reveal the character of Christ. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.” “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

The word of God clearly points out our duty. We are to cultivate kindness and forbearance and love. We are not to misrepresent our brethren because our ideas are not thought to be of the highest value. By our conduct we show what our influence and the principles we hold are worth. If self is our center, self will appear in all we do. If Christ is our center, we shall bear his likeness, and our words will glorify him.

... Shall we not draw nigh to God, fearing to sin against him by being unjust to our brethren? If we hope in God's mercy, we shall manifest the most tender interest in all for whom Christ has died. We shall fear to offend his children. We shall not wound nor bruise his heritage. We shall not, because we are not exalted and honored as we think we should be, handle the reputation of our brethren in a way that offends God, who loves them as he loves us, and who takes as much pleasure in them as he does in us.

The Lord has called us to unity in the bonds of Christian fellowship and love. "A new commandment I give unto you," said Christ, "That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

It is gold of character that God estimates as of value. He reads the purposes of the heart; and he has seen disaffection where his children should have been one in Christian unity. Christ is hungry and thirsty to see Christians working upon Christian principles. In all their afflictions he is afflicted. He longs to see his children manifesting his character. ...

Dissension, bickering, self-seeking, are not of God, but of Satan. In the last great day those who have sympathized with self, and by their words of suspicion have turned in the wrong direction the scale in which the soul of a human being was hanging, will see their mistake. When their influence was needed to turn the balance for the right, they stood under Satan's banner, and did his work, sowing seeds of disunion and criticism; and the blood of souls will be charged to them. They will be held accountable for what they might have done had they been instant in season and out of season in the work of Christ. The wrong impression made upon human minds may live long after those who made it are dead.

We see that which God requires of us. Shall we not put our pride and dignity where it will not be so easily bruised and wounded? Shall we not lay it all at the feet of Christ? Shall we not allow our minds to be softened by the Holy Spirit, that we may not act like children in our association one with another, but as Christ's brave soldiers, go without the camp, and bear the reproach for his sake? Shall we not cherish love rather than strife and hatred? Shall we not covenant with God that we will not be like the children of the wicked one,—pettish, jealous, full of evil

surmisings,—but like a tree that is known by its good fruit? Then by our unity and by our love one for another, all men will see that we are Christians.¹

Christians should be united in their efforts to bring salvation to a fallen world without fighting with each other over petty differences. But how do we reconcile that with Jesus' statement that He came to Earth to turn family members against each other? We will talk about that after we hear Becky Richardson sing "Make Us One," accompanied by JoAn Witzel.

[music – Becky Richardson and JoAn Witzel, "Make Us One"]

Part 2

In the first segment we discussed Jesus' pray for unity in John chapter 17. But, in that first segment we also noted that Matthew said that Jesus came to bring division. It wasn't just Matthew who said that. Mark and Luke also quoted Jesus as saying much the same thing. Let's look at these statements carefully, beginning with Mark 12, verses 12 and 13.

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” [Mark 12: 12-13, NIV]

Notice that Jesus said that “Brother WILL betray brother.” He didn't say He WANTED brothers to betray each other. However, He did accept responsibility for the division when He said, “Everyone will hate you BECAUSE OF ME.” Let's compare that with Luke's version of what Jesus said in chapter 12 of his Gospel.

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” [Luke 12:49-53, NIV]

In this passage He more than accepts responsibility for the division—He welcomes it! Why is that? Let's go back to Matthew 10 again, and read Jesus' longer explanation of how His presence on Earth would bring division. His statements make much more sense when read in context.

“Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who

¹ Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, “Christian Unity”, April 27, 1897, <http://egwtext.whiteestate.org/publication.php?pubtype=Periodical&bookCode=RH&lang=en&year=1897&month=April&day=27&m=1¶graphReferences=1>

stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

“So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn

**“a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’**

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” [Matthew 10: 17-39, NIV]

Jesus didn’t want to turn family members against each other. He wanted family members to be saved; but He realized that not everyone in every family would follow Him to eternal life—and that would cause division.

Did Jesus want to die on the cross? Of course not! He didn’t want to suffer that pain and humiliation. But He took human flesh because He wanted to do what could only be accomplished by dying on the cross. So, He did want to die on the cross, even though He did not want to be crucified.

In the same way, Jesus didn’t want to tear families apart and bring division—but He knew that would be the natural result of preaching the Gospel. He wanted to save as many people as He could by getting them to accept the Gospel message, even though it would bring division.

Why should preaching the Gospel of Christ bring division? We will talk about that in our next segment. But first, let’s ponder those ancient words.

[music – Dave and Sue Pogge, “Ancient Words”]

Part 3

Today we have been discussing how division can create unity. In the first segment we read Jesus prayer for unity in John's Gospel, and in the second segment we read Matthew's, Mark's, and Luke's accounts of how Jesus said He came to bring division. Why would Jesus pray for unity but bring division?

The answer is that Jesus wants us all to be united by believing the Gospel; but preaching the Gospel brings division because the Gospel is not a popular message. That's why so many modern denominations have substituted a sinner-friendly gospel for the true Gospel.

This is by no means a recent development. Even in Paul's day congregations were turning to other gospels.

Near the end of his ministry, Paul wrote this warning to Timothy.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. [2 Timothy 4:3-4, NIV]

Paul was speaking from experience. He had seen that happen in the Corinthian and Galatian churches. To the Corinthians he wrote,

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. [2 Corinthians 11:3-4, NIV]

He was even more emphatic in his letter to the Galatians.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! [Galatians 1:6-9, NIV]

The Gospel is "good news"—but it is not pleasing news. People are constantly trying to revise the Gospel. The Gospel demands a decision for or against God's authority; and not everyone will make the wise choice.

Movies, especially those dealing with the last days of Jesus' life, tend to present Jesus as a nice guy, who went around preaching the love of God, never said a harsh word, but was senselessly murdered. The reason His crucifixion doesn't make sense in those movies is because the movie doesn't present an accurate picture of what happened.

Jesus was murdered because He preached a message that was as unpopular in His day as it is today. He preached a last days judgment message. Yes, He said that God forgives sin—but only if one confesses

and repents of that sin. He didn't say that God excuses continual sinful behavior. If He had preached the pleasant message that many modern Protestant denominations do, He would not have been crucified.

F.F. Bruce wrote a book in 2009 titled, "The Hard Sayings of Jesus." Here's the publisher's description of the book, as posted at Amazon.com.

Like his original hearers[,] many people today find Jesus' sayings hard. Some sayings are hard because they are difficult to understand, others because the demands they make on us are only too clear.

F.F. Bruce examines seventy of the hard sayings of Jesus to clear away the cultural and historical difficulties which keep us from grappling with the real challenge of Jesus' message. ²

Bruce's book could just as easily be titled, "Nearly All the Sayings of Jesus." Nearly everything Jesus said was a hard saying, which many of His listeners found offensive.

Some Bibles have the words of Jesus printed in red. Get one of those Bibles and just read the red letters. You'll see for yourself that nearly everything Jesus said was a "hard saying." That will come as a surprise to Christians who attend a church that emphasizes the few teachings of Jesus that are sinner-friendly. Those churches love to tell the story of the woman caught in adultery, and the prodigal son, and ignore most of the rest of Jesus' parables. Those churches love to quote John 3:16.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [John 3:16, KJV]

But they seldom quote the four verses that Jesus said immediately after that sentence.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. [John 3:17-20, KJV]

Jesus did not come into our world because he wanted to condemn us—He came because He wanted to save us. But when He showed the path to salvation, the world (in general) chose not to take that path, and took the path to condemnation instead. John chapter 3 is a "hard saying" that Jesus said to Nicodemus. Twice He warned Nicodemus:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [John 3:3, 5, KJV]

The whole point of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is that sinners, including you, me, and Nicodemus, need to repent or else they will be lost. But some churches take verse 16 out of context to make it appear that anyone who claims to be a Christian will not perish and have eternal life.

² http://www.amazon.com/Hard-Sayings-Jesus-ebook/dp/B003C80RUK/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1398023271&sr=1-1&keywords=hard+sayings+of+jesus

Jesus made it very clear—you must repent or die. That’s not a popular message. That’s why Jesus was murdered. That’s why John the Baptist was murdered. That’s why all the apostles (except John) were murdered. The only reason John wasn’t murdered is because all attempts to kill him failed.

Generally speaking, Jesus was not loved. He was hated. John quotes Jesus as saying,

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father.” [John 15:18-24, NIV]

We began this broadcast by reading Jesus prayer for unity, found in John 17. For those of you who tuned in late, here it is again.

I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. [John 17:20-23, KJV]

Jesus wants all people to be united with Him; but Jesus also knew that his message would be divisive because the world hates what God loves.

Some people think that the way to achieve unity is to compromise principles. Jesus never endorsed the notion of unity through compromise. He wasn’t willing to soften His message to make it more acceptable. If Jesus wasn’t willing to sacrifice doctrine for increased membership, then we should not, either.

Doctrine matters! Jesus dictated letters to John to pass on to seven churches. Those letters are found in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. Please read those letters, and notice that He praised the church at Ephesus for not accepting the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Jesus said He hated that doctrine. He criticized the church in Pergamum for holding to the teaching of Balaam. Jesus reproved the church in Thyatira for allowing Jezebel to teach that it is OK to eat forbidden food. Jesus threatened to remove the candlesticks of churches that were teaching false doctrines that appealed to the masses.

The Christian world is currently divided because some Protestant denominations have replaced the clear word of God with smooth sayings that itching ears want to hear. They have replaced the Commandments of God with the traditions of men. The Christian world will not be united until it rejects worldly philosophy and accepts the unpopular truth found in God’s world. We pray that the Holy Spirit will bring about a reformation that will unite all Christians with Christ when they finally reject popular false doctrines.

[music – One Church, One Faith, One Lord”]