



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Jesus Prays for Radical Unity in NT Diversity

Bible Reading: John 17:20-26

### SUMMARY:

- Christ's prayer climaxes with a plea for unity among believers –"that they all may be one as we are one." This motivated the Ecumenical Movement. It inspired efforts to 'restore'/'recover' the Church's original unity. It is crucial to grasp that this is a prayer, not a command for our action. The oneness Jesus envisions transcends human achievement; it's a divine creation untouched by doctrinal consensus, liturgical conformity, and institutional uniformity among churches or believers. Instead, Jesus' prayer invites us into the Trinitarian unity, described as perichoresis—a 'divine dance,' the dynamic, loving interplay within the Godhead.
- 'Unity' has been misused to subjugate congregations & churches. But God's oneness is not coercive. Christians are not clones; churches are not replicas. God's oneness honors individuality and church diversity, as seen in the New Testament. The common focus of NT writings is Jesus Christ; its diversity is showcased via authors like John & Paul. Let's reject uniformity, eschew conformity, and abandon futile human efforts. Rather, let's participate in the 'divine dance,' & abide as branches in the Vine, so divine unity can be perfected among us.

### Perspective—A Prayer, Not a Call for Action; 'Window' into the Trinity

- A. Historical: 'That they all may be one'—the Ecumenical Movement's Rallying Cry
- B. A Prayer; Not an Exhortation or Call for Action
  1. 1 preacher asserts (falsely), "This is a mandate from our Commander in Chief that we be one." — T. Evans
- C. John's Unique 'Oneness' Motif
- D. Jesus' Prayer—A 'Window' into the Eternal Trinity (17:1, 5, 24)

### Jesus Prays for Radical Oneness

- A. "If the Bible is our guide... let us at least give this thing... called unity a grand try." — Pastor Otis Gaines Sr.
- B. "Unity in Christ is not something to be achieved; it is something to be recognized." – A. W. Tozer

## The Believers' Unity is the Trinity's Oneness

### A. What it's Not

1. It's Not Uniformity: "What you believe I believe & what I believe you believe"
2. It's Not a humanly-produced Oneness, nor a humanly-imposed Unity
  1. It's "a unity or 'oneness' that cannot be obtained by a human process but can only be an act 'from [God] above,' a unity that's divine from start to 'completion'." — Edward Klink

### B. What it is—Perichoresis in the Trinity

1. Perichoresis—a divine dance: "In Christianity God is not a static thing... but a pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irrelevant, a kind of dance." — C. S. Lewis

### C. The Trinity's Perichoresis enlarged – We're Invited into 'the Dance'

### D. 'Connecting the Dots' in John's Gospel

### E. Perichoresis: Abiding as Branches in Christ the Vine (Jn. 15:1-8)

1. This "unity... rests on the believer's abiding in [Christ]... as the branch abides in the vine" — David A. Black

## Conflict between John's Individualism & Church Unity/Oneness?

### A. John's Individualism – Believers are Not Clones

### B. 'Unity' Misused to enforce conformity & subjugate congregations & churches

1. "The oneness of God... is not coercive." — Stephen Barton

### C. John's Individualism doesn't undermine Christian Community

## Unity & Diversity Evidenced in the New Testament

### A. The Canon of the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16)

### B. Unity & Diversity in NT Writings

### C. Variety among NT Churches—Churches are Not Replicas

### D. NT Church Variety implies Denominations are not inherently wrong

1. "Diversity... is not divisiveness" — David Barrett

### E. Unity & Variety Among churches in Ephesus 80-100 CE