



# Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Examining the text & our hearts:

### 1. Perspective – A Prayer, Not a Call for Action; A ‘Window’ into the Trinity

#### a. Historical: ‘That they all may be one’—the Ecumenical Movement’s Rallying Cry

a. A century ago, “when Western civilization appeared to be coming apart at the seams, Christians around the world were coming together in... ‘the ecumenical movement’ ... Its rallying cry was ‘That they all may be one’ (Jn. 17:21-22). At the outset of the 21st century, the [ecumenical] movement [aka. the World Council of Churches] arouses little enthusiasm, & the text seems tired.” [Lamar Williamson, *Preaching... John*, p. 229]

#### b. A Prayer; Not an Exhortation or Call for Action

a. 1 preacher asserts (falsely) that “This is a mandate from our Commander in Chief that we be one.” — T. Evans

b. “John 17... is a prayer of Jesus to his Father, delivered in the presence of his disciples.” — M.J.J. Menken

c. “As important as evangelism is... [Jesus here] is not exhorting the church to participate in evangelism... As commendable as ecumenical partnerships are, ... [Jesus] is not exhorting involvement in ecumenical dialogue. [He’s] not exhorting the church here. He’s not instructing. He’s not preaching, teaching, or rallying the troops. Jesus is praying... [It’s] a prayer on our behalf; [we] aren’t called to action in that moment.” – Mary H. Shore

d. Its “important... for the reader of John 17 to assume the posture of one being prayed for.” — Fred Craddock

e. “The text... [is] not an exhortation, but... a prayer. What if we consider the church... as the community of those for whom Christ prays? What if I consider myself not as an ambitious achiever or a failed sinner, not as a thinker or doer, but as one for whom Christ prays?” [Lamar Williamson, *Op. cit.*, p. 233]

#### c. John’s Unique ‘Oneness’ Motif

a. “The 4th Gospel’s oneness motif with its relational/revelational character... stands out as singularly unique in the NT... In Paul the term... ‘oneness’ never appears in a relational sense as a Christological motif... Against the background of [other NT writings] the uniqueness of the 4th Gospel’s ‘oneness’ motif becomes incredibly clear.” [Mark L. Appold, *Oneness Motif in the 4th Gospel*, pp. 289, 291, 294]

#### d. Oneness in John is Deeper than in Paul’s Writings (1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2; 4:2; Eph. 4:3)

a. “I urge... all of you to agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, & that you be united with the same understanding & the same conviction.” (1 Cor. 1:10)

b. “...think the same way, have the same love, be united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” (Phil. 2:2)

c. “I urge Euodia & I urge Syntyche [2 sisters in Christ] to agree in the Lord.” (Phil. 4:2)

d. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Eph. 4:3)

## e. Context: Jesus' Prayer 'bookends' his Farewell Discourse

a. "The occurrences narrated in Jn. 13:1-17:26 are situated at the Last Supper where 3 major events transpire: [1.] the washing of the apostles' feet & subsequent dialogues between Jesus & his disciples (13:1-38). [2.] The farewell discourse (14:1-16:33); & [3.] Jesus' prayer (17:1-16). The metaphor of the Vine & Branches, is part of [2.] the Lord's last teaching to his followers." [R.Gribble, Parables of Jesus, p. 50]

## f. Jesus' Prayer—A 'Window' into the Eternal Trinity (17:1, 5, 24)

- a. "In Jn. 17 Jesus speaks of his life within the Godhead before he came to earth... Jn. 17:5 & of 'the words' he has received from the Father (17:8). Within the Trinity from all eternity, there [have] been...words... In Jn. 17, we get a glimpse of this speaking in Jesus' prayer to his Father. It's divine discourse." [T. Keller, Prayer, p. 51]
- b. "Father...Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you." (17:1)
- c. "Father, glorify me in your presence with that glory I had with you before the world existed." (17:5)
- d. "Father...you loved me before the world's foundation." (17:24)
- e. "It's always been the greatest desire of the Son to glorify the Father, & at the same time, it's the highest priority of the Father to glorify the Son (17:1). ...The Spirit...in turn glorifies the Son, who has been seeking to glorify the Father & the Spirit (12:28; 16:14-15; Rom. 11:36)." [Justin Kendrick, Sacred Us, p.]

## 2. 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

## c. Prayer for All Disciples

- a. "I pray not only for these [disciples], but also for those who believe in me through their word." (Jn. 17:20)
- b. "The prayer embraces both ['these' and 'those'] as belonging together" — R. C. H. Lenski
- c. "In 17:20 Jesus...is no longer praying only for the disciples present with him but for all who will in the future believe in him through the testimony of these first witnesses." [Lamar Williamson, Op. cit., p. 229]
- d. Jesus "prays for unity between his disciples and those who will believe through their word so that all disciples, present and future, may be in the Father & the Son..." [Frank J. Matera, NT Theology, p. 303]
- e. "The scope of Jesus' petition...makes it... an affirmation of the 'communion of the saints.' It encompasses past & future believers in an almost unimaginable circle of unity." [Charles B. Cousar, Texts for Preaching, p. 338]

## d. For their Radical Unity

## a. Unity/Oneness in John—the most profound in the NT

- a. "The unity of Christian believers, for which prayer is here made, is... radical & fundamental: it is rooted in the being of God, revealed in Christ, & in the redemptive action of God in Christ. The prayer 'that they may be one'... is defined as 'that they may be in us' [Father & Son]." [George Beasley-Murray, John, p. 302]
- b. "The point here...is a unity or 'oneness' that is...controlled by, defined by, & shared by the unity of the Father & the Son... [It] cannot be obtained by a human process but can only be an act 'from [God] above,' a unity that is divine from start to 'completion'...not by organization." [Edward W. Klink, John, p. 724]
- c. "In the profoundest sense, the unity ...in this prayer, is not an achievement; it is a gift. It is not to be created [by us], but received, recognized & exhibited. It exists primarily in the mutual indwelling of the Father & the Son... [It's] shown forth in believers who are drawn into it." [Daniel B. Stevick, Jesus & His Own, p. 359]

## b. God's Oneness in Trinity—'unity amid diversity'

- a. "For Jesus to call for the unity of his followers, with their various temperaments & abilities, is not a non sequitur. A multiplicity of persons could never truly express oneness if God had not shown himself to be one even in his plurality, the unity amid diversity, the power that establishes & guarantees community. As Barth insightfully puts it, 'Unless God were three in one, no great feat would be accomplished by calling him 'One'.' Likewise, if the church fails to prove its unity in diversity, it cannot attest to the oneness of God." [David A. Black, "On the Style & Significance of Jn. 17," Criswell Theological Review, Vol. 3.1 (1988) p. 156]
- b. Not mere Analogy: "The unity for which Christ prays is a unity which rests on the unity of the Son and the Father. This does not mean that the unity between believers & God is exactly the same as the unity between Christ & the Father. But it does mean that because God is one, his people are to live on the basis & in the recognition of unity. L. Morris uses too weak an expression when he speaks of an 'analogy,' for there is a causal connection between the two. The unity of the church dynamically, effectively, & epistemologically depends upon the oneness & unity of God." [David A. Black, Op. cit., p. 155]

## 3. The Believers' Unity is the Intra-Trinitarian Oneness

## a. Described in Jesus' Prayer A. "That they may be one as we [Father &amp; Son] are one" (17:22b)

- a. "Jesus' petition, in Jn. 17 [is that] the believers may be one as he & the Father are one. This petition is important enough to occur 4 times, first in reference to Jesus' disciples (17:11), subsequently with reference to those who will come to faith...through the disciples' witness (17:21, 22, 23). On the last occasion we find the climactic expression... 'that they may be perfected into one' (17:23) recalling the expression 'gathered into one' in Jn. 11:52.... The unity of

believers is evidently... a dynamic process of becoming one, to be completed only [in the End time] ...The location... in the final part of Jesus' prayer to the Father...suggests the key importance of this thought –that the believers are to be one as Jesus & the Father are one –for John's theology." [Richard Bauckham, Gospel of Glory,p. 34]

b. Believers' Oneness not identical to, but reflective of the Trinity's Oneness

- a. "May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us..." (17:21-22a)
- b. "The indwelling of other persons is an exclusive prerogative of God.' No human being...can be internal to another self as the subject of action,not even mutual love. 'Human persons are always external to one another as subjects.' (Volf)...These distinctions may help us understand why... John uses 'in-one-another' language of the relations between the Father & the Son & of their relations with humans, but not of inter-human relationships." [Richard Bauckham, Op. cit.,p. 39]
- c. The oneness of Father & Son is characterized by "'in-one-another.' [Yet] Jesus never says that just as he is in the Father & the Father is in him, so the believers are to be in one another. What he says is just as the Father is in him & [vice versa], so they may be 'in us' (17:21)." [R.Bauckham, Op.cit.,p. 35]

c. Believers' Oneness Resemblesthe Trinity's Oneness(17:22-23)

- a. "That they may be one as we are one. I am in them & you are in me, so...they may be made completely one"
- b. "'As' (kathos) has...comparative force... [It states] an analogy between the unity of Father & Son & that of the Christian community...[It] doesn't require that the two correspond completely[i.e.,] the oneness of believers is exactly like the unity of Jesus & the Father...Only that there's a resemblance." [Bauckham, p. 35]

b. Intra-Trinitarian Oneness – What it is

- a. "Focusing on Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17, that his disciples may be one...To speak of the oneness of the church is not a call to enforce humanly-imposed unity on the church, but rather, it is a claim that the Church is one in virtue of its relationship to the one God." [Joshua Cockayne, Explorations in Analytical Ecclesiology, p. xi]

b. Trinity's Oneness the foundation for Believers' Oneness

- a. "Jesus' prayer in John 17 "draws...to a close with the striking [petition] that Christ's disciples [would] be one just as the Father & the Son are one... This notion [is] key to understanding [John's view of the Church] ... Any account of the Church's oneness must not depart from this foundation in the oneness of the persons in the Trinity..." [Joshua Cockayne, Op. cit.,p.2]

c. Believers abiding in union with Christ (Jn. 15:2-8)

- a. "The unity for which Christ prays...rests on the believer's abiding in him...as the branch abides in the vine" –David A. Black
- b. "This unity is never merely outward & external, since it involves the union of believers with a spiritual Being. Thus,the unity for which Christ prays is essentially a unity which rests upon the believer's abiding in him just as the branch abides in the vine (15:1-8).This relationship with Christ is evidenced...by a loving &patient attitude toward others." [David A. Black, Op. cit.,p. 157]

d. Believers participate in the Trinity's Oneness

- a. "John's words in 17:22 ('that they may be one as we are one. I in them & you in me'), express participation within the divine reality of the Father-Son interrelation'(Byers). That is, these words speak not only of one people in a way that powerfully reflects God's identity... but also, the oneness of these people is a meta-physical reality in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit... 'Jesus does not just pray that the disciples will share in his mission; beyond a task-oriented or functional unity, Jesus prays that this new social reality will actually share in his preexistent glory'(Byers). The Church is a social entity in which God's people share in the life of Christ." [Joshua Cockayne, Op. cit.,p. 4]

e. Participation,Not mere imitation

- a. As Jn. 17:21... make[s] explicit, this unity is more than imitationof the Father-Son unity; it is participation in that divine unity... The disciples participate, & must continue to participate, in that unity of Father & Son ... 'in the very mutuality of the Triune God' –that enables unity in the community of the disciples. Jesus' prayer implies that unity requires prayer & divine assistance, & that disunityis something from which the disciples must be protected..." [Michael J. Gorman, Abide & Go: Mission...in...John, p. ]

f. Produced by the Holy Spirit

- a. "The Holy Spirit as the principal agent of the Church's unity. The Church is one because it is a group that the Holy Spirit brings about through his coordinating influence upon the feelings, thoughts, & actions of distinct individuals. It is one because the Holy Spirit uniquely & ultimately leads people to act as one in obedience to Christ's commands." [Steven Nemes, Review of J. Cockayne...]

g. All Christ's Believers are 'one flock' with one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)

- a. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, &my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, &I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. 16But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, &they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd." (10:14-16)
- b. "Unity among Christians is founded on that of the Father & the Son. The Son claimed to be identical with the Father ['I &the Father are one' (10:30)] 'one': neuter 'one thing' [nature]); precisely he is the sole shepherd of the flock(10:16)." [Paul A. Rainbow, Johannine Theology,p. 381]

c. Intra-Trinitarian Oneness – What it's Not

a. It's Not absorption into God, or loss of personality

- a. "In prayer Jesus asks the Father that believers may participate in the divine life itself & experience unity by dwelling within the divine Community [of the Trinity]. ...His prayer does not suggest absorption into God where personality is lost, nor does it

suggest that believers become a necessary and essential part of the divine community [Trinity]." [Royce G. Gruenler, Trinity in... John, p. 128]

b. It's Not Uniform beliefs: "What you believe I believe & what I believe you believe"

- a. We might think ...that the oneness of Christ's followers described by John implies that the Church is called to overcome their disagreements &... unite as one body across traditions... [Thus,] Johan Blumhardt [writes] 'Do we as Jesus' disciples really want to become one?...We must find a way where what you believe I believe & what I believe you believe. For the Lord says in his prayer '...that they may be one as we are one.' Blumhardt's assumption here is that oneness entails a uniformity of belief. The Church's oneness means I must believe what you believe & vice versa. The problem with such readings...which stress ideal social harmony above all else, is that they fail to recognize what's at the foundation of John's narrative. Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17 must be read in light of John's use of oneness language throughout the Gospel. As A.Byers puts it, 'approaches that understand 'one' as signifying a unity of social harmony or a unity of function or mission do not sufficiently take this prior narrative development into interpretive account'. (A.Byers, "Shema, John 17...", p. ) [Joshua Cockayne, Op. cit.,p. 2]
- b. "The second pitfall to be avoided is to regard the unity of the church as a purely social or organizational phenomenon. The unity spoken of [in Jn.17] is not a matter of agreement on doctrinal or other matters. It is something vastly more difficult... This unity is never merely outward and external, since it involves the union of believers with a spiritual Being. Thus,the unity for which Christ prays is essentially a unity which rests upon the believer's abiding in him just as the branch abides in the vine."[David Black, Op. cit.,p. 157]

c. It's Not Uniformity:"we must...speak the same thing, & be of one mind in the Lord"

- a. "Some... press for 'uniformity.' They ask each group to give up their unique assignment in order to have unity with others. This would be tragic! Uniformity is not the same thing as unity, just as diversity is not disunity!" [Henry T. Blackaby, God-Centered Church, p. 260]
- b. "The church, consisting of families from every tribe, tongue, people, & nation (Rev. 7:9) who call on the name of the Lord, is the true, catholic church...Our primary duty flowing from the oneness of the church is that we must learn to speak the same thing, & be of one mind in the Lord(1 Cor. 1:10). Our objective unity in the truth is the only way to promote & produce our subjective unity in friendship, fellowship, & worship. The oneness for which Christ prayed is rooted in intra-Trinitarian oneness & love (Jn. 17:23-26) ..." [Ryan M. McGraw, Mystery Revealed: 31 Meditations on the Trinity, p. ]

d. It's Not a humanly-produced Oneness, nor a humanly-imposed Unity

- 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
- c. "This prior divine... unity is more fundamentally a gift than it is a task. It is... a reality already & always happening in God." [David F. Ford, John,p. 349]
- d. "Focusing on Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17... the oneness of the church is not a call to enforce humanly-imposed unity on the church, but rather, it is a claim that the Church is one in virtue of its relationship to the one God." [Joshua Cockayne, Op. cit.,p. xi]
- a. "The oneness of God...is not coercive."–Stephen Barton
- e. God's "gift of love...is not coercive, it does not force people to belong...By laying down his life... the Good Shepherd opens up the way for an [end-time] people of God made up of Gentiles... [&] Jews: the 'one flock' led by the 'one shepherd'. But, tragically, this new... unity... is a cause of offense & separation. The oneness of God...is not coercive." [Stephen Barton, Christian Community, pp. 186, 294]
- f. "A unity based on... power & coercion is not the oneness for which Jesus prays in John 17." –John R. Franke

e. It's Not Social Harmony, Nor Unity of Action, Mission

- a. "Approaches that understand 'one' as signifying a unity of social harmony or a unity of function or mission do not sufficiently take this prior narrative development into interpretive account." [Andrew Byers, Shema, John 17, & Jewish-Christian Identity," p.]
- b. "The prayer is for the unity of all who believe. There's nothing here of unity as political expediency, or as mutual accommodation to error, or as agreement on the level of the lowest common denominator. The unity... here is...informed & empowered by the unity of God & Christ." [Fred Craddock, Preaching Thro...,p. 270]

f. It's Not the Identical Organizational Structures or Ecumenical Initiatives

- a. "The oneness of the church is not a call to enforce humanly-imposed unity on the church"—Joshua Cockayne
- b. "The Holy Spirit's unifying...uncouples...the Church's unity from...uniformity of doctrine or organizational structure."–Steven Nemes
- c. "The unity... [in John.17] is not a matter of agreement on doctrinal or other matters" –David A. Black
- d. "The emphasis in John's use of ['oneness'] language in Jn. chap. 17...stresses not social harmony, but rather 'social identity construction around Israel's God' (Byers)...The foundation of [church] oneness can be found only in the work of the one God & not by enforcing organizational structures & ecumenical initiatives onto the Church from the outside." [Joshua Cockayne, Op. cit.,p. 4]

d. The Purpose of Jesus' Prayer for the Believers' Unity (17:21c,23c, 26)

- a. "John 17...is Jesus' prayer for the Father's intervention to bring the disciples to perfection." —M.P. Hera
- b. "The purpose...of Jesus' payer for unity is spelled out in the final clause[s]... 'so that the world may believe you sent me' (17:21c) & so 'that the world may know you've sent me & have loved them as you have loved me' (17:23c) ...Two things Jesus wants the world to believe & know: 'you sent me' & you have 'loved [the disciples] as you've loved me'... The central message of John's Gospel." [L. Williamson, Op. cit., p. 231]

- c. "I made your name known to them & will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them & I may be in them." (17:26)
- d. "The love between the Father & the Son is the source of the Son's mission. (17:26) This inclusion of believers in the love of the Father & the Son, through the 'in-one-another' relationship of God & believers, is surely the heart of John's [view of salvation]. Its result is the oneness of believers, reflecting the oneness of Jesus & the Father — surely the key to [John's view of the Church]. But, there's a further stage in the way the love of the Father & Son takes effect in the world. Twice Jesus prays that the believers may be one 'so that the world may believe/know' (17:21, 23) ... The loving community of believers witnesses to the love of God in Christ for all the world to see." [Richard Bauckham, *Op. cit.*, p. 40]The Purpose of Jesus' Prayer for the Believers' Unity (17:21c, 23c, 26)

e. Conclusion of Jesus' Prayer (17:24)

- a. "Father, I want those you've given me to be with me where I am, so that they will see my glory..." (Jn. 17:24)
- b. "Jesus here contemplates life-beyond-death for his disciples as well as for himself... Jesus prays for reunion with his disciples after his death [& resurrection], & after theirs as well... The final words of his prayer... express Jesus' deep desire for his disciples of all time: 'so that the love you've loved me with may be in them & I may be in them' (17:26). In 17:24 Jesus prays for the disciples... after their death... here [in 17:26] ...he expresses his yearning to come & live in them where they are, here on earth." [Williamson, *Op. cit.*, p. 232]

4. Perichoresis: The Trinity—'3 persons' mutual relationship as the one...God

a. Perichoresis—a divine dance:

- a. "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 quoted Justin Kendrick, *Sacred Us*, p. ]
- b. "The Bible tells us. Each of the [3] divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, & adoration into them. Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, & rejoices in the others. This creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy & love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this – perichoresis. Notice our word 'choreography' within it. It means literally to 'dance or flow around.'" [Timothy Keller, *Reason for God*, p. 215]"The Father...Son...& Holy Spirit glorify each other... At the center of the universe, self-giving love is the dynamic currency of the Trinitarian life of God. The persons within God exalt, commune with each other, & defer to one another... John's Gospel tells us that the Father is 'in' the Son & that the Son is 'in' the father (17:21), & that each loves & glorifies the other... When Greek Christians spoke of perichoresis in God they meant that each divine person harbors the others at the center of his being. In constant movement of overture & acceptance each person envelops and encircles the others." [Cornelius Plantinga Jr., quoted Mark S. McLeod-Harrison, *Make/Believing the World(s)*, pp. 318-9]
- c. "The relational dynamics of the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit's shared life are sometimes referred to [as] perichoresis. Based on two Greek words peri (around) & chorein (to give way), perichoresis... not only denotes personal indwelling, but also dance-like movement. These perichoretic dynamics can be discerned in Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17:1 'Father... glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you' & in Jn. 16:14. Where Jesus says 'the Spirit...will glorify me.' In passages like these, perichoretic movements... [within the Trinity] are apparent... The three divine persons 'mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another.'... The Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit are three relations who are persons." [Lex McMillan, "Social God, Relational Selves," in *Stories of Therapy... of Faith*, p. 8]
- d. "The concept of 3 persons in 1 essence... [needs] a dynamic model... described by the Greek term perichoresis,... can be translated as 'mutual indwelling' or 'interpenetration' & describes the way the [Trinity's] 3 persons relate to each other. The concept is that Father, Son, & Spirit are distinct, yet each shares intimately in the life of the others (Jn. 17:21-23). In other words, the Trinity is a community of being... a community of mutual love. This community is not a collection of individual members of a class of beings called 'deity,' but the three persons in their mutual relationship as the one & only God." [Ruth Sutcliffe, *Trinity Hurdle*, p. 199]Perichoresis in the Trinity

b. The Trinity's Perichoresis extended to Believers

a. Invited into the Dance:

- a. "Why would He create us?... [God] must have created us to invite us into the dance, to say: If you glorify me, if you center your life on me, if you find me beautiful for who I am in myself, then you will step into the dance, which is what you were made for... You are made to center everything in your life on me. To serve me... That's where you'll find you joy. That's what the dance is all about... Are you in the dance or do you just believe God is out there somewhere? Are you in the dance or do you just pray to God... when you're in trouble?... If life is a divine dance, then you need more than anything else to be in it. That's what you're built for. You were made to enter into the divine dance with the Trinity." [Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King*, p. 11]
- b. God's "desire for perichoretic union, fully realized only in the Trinity, extends to humanity, as in Jn. 17:21-22, where in his prayer... Jesus offers his own unity with the Father as the promise of human inclusion: 'may they also be in us... so that they may be one, as we are one.'" [R. T. Leupp, *Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 74]

b. Trinity's Unity models the Church's Unity

- a. "Social trinitarians... point... to Jesus'... prayer in John 17 as ... biblical [basis] for their model [of the Social Trinity]. There, amid the perichoretic language of 'oneness' & 'in-ness,' Jesus prays to the Father that the believers (the church) 'may be one, as we are one.' For 'one' John uses the generic Greek word hen, a kind of oneness that admits plurality, rather than heis..."

strict numerical oneness [unique, only] (17:22; cf. 17:20-3). In John's simple, but subtle, syntax he presents the trinitarian unity here as the model or paradigm for the church's unity. The church... in turn becomes an analogy for the Trinity: a diversity of persons united by human genus, spiritual birth, & Christian purpose, one body of witness in the world." [Richard J. Plantinga, Introduction to Christian Theology, p. 156]

#### c. Unity of Distinct Persons – the Trinity & the Church

- a. "Jesus fervently prays for the vindication of the social model in the 'new society' [of believers], just as it is a reality in the Triune Family [the Trinity]. The reality of distinct personalities within essential unity is attested in the formula 'we... one,' and it is replicated in the circle of the redeemed 'they... one'." [Royce G. Gruenler, Trinity in...John, p. 125]

#### d. Participation doesn't erase Personhood

- a. "'Eternal life' entails numerous benefits... personal wellbeing is certainly one. Yet, the implication of Jesus' teaching is that the knowledge of God amounts to fellowship with him and with other believers in the same sort of perichoretic communion he possesses with the Father (Jn. 1:18; 10:15) ... [It is] God's intention that believers participate actively & corporately in the dynamic of perichoretic love shared between the Father & the Son (Jn. 17:20-23). The 'knowing' Christ speaks of does not erase the limits and distinctions of individual personhood. We do not, through communion with Christ, become God (nor do we cease to be ourselves)." [Jonathan P. Badgett, Mirrors of Self: Human Personhood..., pp. 21-22]
- a. "The vine & branches is a call for the disciples to remain (abide) in him... The idea of 'abiding' is the same as what the Father & Son enjoy together... There's no textual distinction between the 'abiding' of the Father & Son & the 'abiding' of Christ in the believer or the believer in Christ... 'Abiding' in Jn. 15 is evidence for the union of the believer & Christ being perichoretic... [There are] connections between the trinitarian perichoresis & Christ's union with the believer... The meaning of 'abide' is 'coinherence,' one of the synonyms for perichoresis." [James D. Gifford Jr., Perichoretic Salvation, p. ]Perichoresis: Believers' abiding as Branches in Christ the Vine (Jn. 15:1-8)

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

- a. "The main texts... depict... the believer's union with Christ in John's Gospel... as perichoretic 'mutual indwelling' ... on par with the relationship the Father & Son have enjoyed from eternity. Jesus' prayer in Jn. 17:21-23 summarizes John's message... The foot-washing... of Jn. 13 shows that Jesus' 'part' is shared by the disciples. ... The vine imagery of Jn. 15 clearly states the mutual indwelling of Christ & the believer that is directly connected to the mutual indwelling of the Father & Son... These passages... show that the union of the believer & Christ share many... elements of the union of Father & Son... a type of... perichoresis." [James D. Gifford Jr., Perichoretic Salvation, p. ]

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

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

- a. "The Fourth Gospel is one of the most strongly individualistic of all the NT writings" — C.F.D. Moule
- b. "Throughout the Gospel [of John]... the primary concern is the relation of each individual to Christ: it is the sheep to the Shepherd, branch to vine, not sheep to sheep or branch to branch. Eternal life is for anyone who is in real contact with Christ. [End-time events are] ...usually ...of the individual: here & now, & on his[or her] own account, he has passed over to [eternal] life or stands condemned." [C.F.D. Moule, Origin of Christology, p. 66]
- c. "It cannot be fortuitous that [Johannine] literature lacks completely the term 'church' (Gk. ekklesia). For John the believers... form a society under the imagery of a flock (Jn. 10) & the vine (Jn. 15), but... in such images the important thing is the personal relationship the believer sustains to the Lord himself. As the sheep hear the shepherd's voice when he calls each by name (10:3-5), so there's no possibility of life unless the separate branches are linked to the parent stem of the vine (15:4, 5). [In] John's view of the church... the church is made up of individual followers who are joined one-by-one to the Lord, and the worship they offer springs directly out of the experience of [Christ]-enriched individualism" [Ralph P Martin, Worship of God, pp 206-7]

#### b. John 17 – a later addition? A Rejected Solution!

- a. "'Source and Redaction Criticism' ... has led scholars to suggest that John 17 is a later addition by the evangelist or a later redactor [reviser, editor] ... [in an effort to] explain the problems that arise from the text... Paul N. Anderson [opines that] 'The priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 is the least original chapter in the entire Gospel of John'." [Marianus P. Hera, Christology & Discipleship in John 17, p. 15 & #69]

#### c. 'Vertical & Horizontal' Unity

- a. "From the [Jesus] community's new vertical connection with God [produced by Christ's cross] follows its inherent horizontal unity, since the unity of the Trinity defines the horizontal unity of the [Christian] community. As the Father is one with the Son (Jn. 10:30), the community displays, within itself, this very same oneness. Commenting on... Jesus' [Jn. 17] prayer (17:20-21) Schlatter remarks: 'This is why here (Jn. 17:21) the community's unity rests on Jesus' oneness with the Father... Jesus' love... for the church [is] the source of its love; his connection with the Father is its foundation & rule [source?] for its own harmony.' ... As the Godhead is characterized by... unity in distinction ...so too is the new community of faith. The inner unity & harmony of the new community of faith is thus rooted in the loving fellowship between the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit. Horizontal oneness as it is rooted in the Trinitarian oneness is the key characteristic of Christianity... Opt[ing] for an already-but-not-yet view of [Church] reality... the new community... lives in hope, looking forward to its final completion... 'God has appointed... (Jesus) the completer of the community & he will fulfill his calling by completing it' (Schlatter)." [Michael Bräutigam, Union with Christ, p. ]

- b. "In the same way as the Trinity does not consist of 'individuals,' but distinct persons in unity, so too does the [Christian] community represent distinct members who live in harmony with God & each other. [There's] a relational analogy between Trinitarian oneness and the community's oneness in distinction." [Michael Bräutigam, *Union with Christ: Adolf Schlatter's Relational Christology*, p.]
- d. Misuse of 'Unity' to enforce conformity & subjugate congregations & churches
- a. We are remiss if we don't point out the potential misuse of the biblical mandate for 'unity' as a means to enforce conformity & subjugate congregations & churches. Consider Tony Evans' exposition on oneness:
- a. "This is a mandate from our Commander in Chief that we be one with Him (vertically) &, as a result, one with each other (horizontally)... An additional benefit of oneness is found in the OT... 'Behold, how good & how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!... for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.' (Ps. 133:1-3). Unity is where the blessing of God rests... The reverse is true: where there's disunity, there is limited blessing." [Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, p.]
- b. There are problems here. [1.] This is not a 'mandate' (order); it's Jesus' prayer. [2.] The potential for abuse goes unmentioned. Consider a church-wide issue where one believer feels differently from the rest of the congregation. Is that Christian harassed because he/she (allegedly) 'caused' the lack of God's blessing?
- c. "A unity based on... power & coercion is not the oneness for which Jesus prays in John 17." –John R. Franke
- e. John's Individualism doesn't undermine Christian Community
- a. We can "affirm the... importance of individuals without losing the emphasis on the community... The apparent conflict... between the individual and the community is superficial." –Joshua Cockayne
- b. "Bauckham... thinks John's anthropology is distinctly individualistic... [&] argues that the evangelist... prioritize[s] the individual above the community... 'Readers or hearers are simply not allowed to forget that response to Jesus has to be individual to be real... [He] thinks whilst John provides a vision of a new social reality in Christ, this never erases the priority of individuals... 'The life of the community, the disciples' mutual love, stems from the relationship between each individual and Jesus. The latter entails the former, but individual relationship to Jesus has priority' (Bauckham)." [Joshua Cockayne, *Op. cit.*, p. 5]
6. Unity & Diversity Evidenced in the New Testament
- a. The Canon of the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16)
- a. "All Scripture is inspired by God & is profitable for teaching... rebuking... correcting... training" (2 Tim. 3:16)
- b. "On the one hand, there's an undeniable theological diversity in the writings of the NT that we cannot avoid & should not dismiss. On the other [hand]... the NT as a witness to God's self-revelation in Christ ... [has] an inner unity that binds these writings together." [Frank J. Matera, *NT Theology*, p. xvi]
- c. Evangelical Christians accept the NT as their "canon, a definition or yardstick by which to measure Christianity (the constitutional documents...) ... Given the fact of the NT canon and what is in it, ... it means unity & diversity... [The NT] canon reflects the breadth of acceptable diversity... lines were drawn so as to include James as well as early Paul, the Apocalypse [Revelation] as well as Acts, John as well as the Synoptics... They were canonized ... in all their diversity, despite their range of diversity... It was the leading of the Spirit which enabled [the early Church] to acknowledge... a range of documents which ... richly embody the diverse vitality [of the Jesus movement]." [James DG. Dunn, *Unity & Diversity*, pp. xxx-xxx]
- d. "The NT in all its diversity still bears consistent testimony to the unifying center... Jesus-the-man-now-exalted as the [focal] 'canon within the canon' ... The NT... recognizes the validity of diversity; it canonizes [validates] very different expressions of Christianity... [The NT] canonizes the unity of Christianity, but also ... canonizes [validates] the diversity of Christianity... To recognize the canon of the NT is to affirm the diversity of Christianity... We must recognize that other theological claims & ecclesiastical forms which embody the unifying faith in Jesus ... are authentic & valid expressions of Christianity." [James Dunn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 376-7] The Canon of the New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16)
- b. Unity & Diversity in NT Writings
- a. "There is a fundamental unifying strand running through earliest Christianity & the NT... & that unifying strand [is] Jesus himself... The unifying strand narrows again & again to Christ alone... The unity of 1st-century Christianity focuses... On Jesus the man now exalted, Christ crucified but risen." [J. Dunn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 370-2]
- b. There's "a marked degree of diversity within 1st-century Christianity... There are many different expressions of Christianity within the NT... ['Jewish Christianity,' (James, Matt.); Hellenistic Christianity,' (Paul, John); Apocalyptic Christianity,' (Thess., Rev.); 'Early Catholicism,' (Pastorals: Tim., Titus)] There was no single normative form of Christianity in the 1st century... When we looked at individual churches the picture was the same – of diversity in expression of faith & life-style..." [James Dunn, *Op. cit.*, pp. 372-4]
- c. Variety among NT Churches—Churches are Not Replicas
- a. "It is apparent that within the NT era there were marked differences in belief as well as practice between different congregations. They were united in their common allegiance to Jesus the Lord, but as to their patterns of worship they were not uniform." [B.G. McNair Scott, *Apostles Today*, p.]

- b. A False Claim: “In Rev. 2 & 3 the 7 churches are different on the negative side. They are different in their failures, mistakes, sinful things & wrong doings... 7 lampstands... are the...7 churches. These 7 lampstands are all identical in nature, in essence, in size, in type, in appearance, & in function... How could you say these 7 local churches are different? The Lord rebuked their differences.” [W. Lee, *Collected Works*, 1994-97, V.1, p. ]
- d. NT Church Variety implies Denominations are not inherently wrong
- a. “Diversity... is not divisiveness” –David Barrett
- a. There are “pitfalls that must be avoided in interpreting John 17. The first is to regard denominationalism as something inherently wrong. A multiplicity of denominations does not necessarily imply that Christianity is sectarian. To quote D. Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*: ‘Diversity–divergences in faith & practice from one denomination to another–is not divisiveness; it’s what we would expect when Christianity is being spread among some 8,990 peoples speaking 7,010 languages in the modern world [by 1982].’ R. Webber likewise writes that ‘an adequate theology of the church cannot ignore the [multiple forms] of the church. The church has unfolded in many forms, & no one single external form stands alone as the correct visible expression. As the church settled in various geographical areas and as it penetrated through a variety of cultures, it found expression in multifaceted forms. Thus, the insistence that the church must exist in a single form is a denial not only of the richness of creation, but also of the complexities of the human response.’ Hence there’s no question of an attempt to establish a world church in which everyone would be a catholic, or an orthodox, or an evangelical, not to mention a Methodist, a Southern Baptist, [or a ‘Local Church’] & so forth.” [David A. Black, *Op. cit.*, pp. 156-7]
- e. Unity & Variety Among churches in Ephesus 80-100 CE
- a. “From around 80–100 CE there were a number of different groups in Ephesus who regarded themselves as Christians – [1.] the Pauline group addressed in the Pastorals [1-2 Tim. & Titus], [2.] the Johannine group spoken of in 1-3 John...” [Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, p. 712]
- b. “The Pauline group & the Johannine group ... the readers of the Pastorals & ... of 1-3 John ... would have been aware of each other’s existence, would not have refused contact with one another... & would have had ‘non-hostile relations.’... We cannot call this ‘unity’ – they clearly retained the distinct identity of their separate groups... While preserving their distinctive identity ... they would have been willing to acknowledge the validity of each other [as] part of the wider movement ... [of] early Christianity.” [Paul Trebilco, *Op. cit.*, pp. 712, 716]
- a. Resistance to the Bishop’s Centralized Control
- c. “In the early 2nd century Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch...was taken to Rome for martyrdom. En route he wrote the Asian churches, including Ephesus [105-110 CE], seeking to expand the local bishop’s centralized control. We suggest “Johannine Christians were... a significant group among those who resisted the bishop ... Ignatius was encouraging these Johannine Christians to come under the authority of the [local] bishop... Ignatius conceives of unity in terms of the complete subordination of individual interests to the group & the suppression or elimination of dissent.” [Paul Trebilco, *Op. cit.*, pp. 670, 678]