

September 24th, 2017

## UNWORLDLY UNITY

John 17:20-23

The ruin of the human race is not only that we have been alienated from God, but that we have alienated from each other. The apostle Paul says in **Titus 3:3** “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, *hated* by others and *hating one another*.” There is nothing more tragic that can be *conceived* than to be born, to live a life alienated from Jesus Christ and others, to die, and then enter into an eternity only suffer under the wrath of a holy God and be the tormentor and the tormented of others. To be outside of Christ is to be utterly and inescapably alone. There are no friends in hell. The fall ruined not only our relationship with God, but it ruined every other relationship.

When Jesus Christ invaded planed earth, everything changed. Not only has Jesus reconciled His people to God, but He reconciled His people to each other. **Ephesians 2:13-14** “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both *one* and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.”

This is one of the great glories of the gospel. Jesus reconciled His people into one body. We have not only been united to Christ, but we have been united to each other. **1 Cor. 12:13** says “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” And this unity is one of the *means* of convincing the world that the gospel is true. At the end of **v.21** we hear Jesus pray for our unity “so that the world may *believe* that you have sent me.” And then again in **v.23** “so that the world *may know* that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” Let that soak in. Jesus is saying that the communion of the saints is a means of persuading the world to believe the gospel. Should this be a surprise to us? As Reformed people, we don’t deny that God uses means to accomplish His ends. Do we not affirm that God uses the means of preaching to save the elect

(**Romans 10:17**)? Do we not affirm that we are to give a reason for the hope that is in us to those who are perishing (**1 Peter 3:15**)? Do we not affirm that we are to correct our opponents with gentleness in the hope that God would grant them repentance (**2 Timothy 2:24-25**)? Yes we affirm all these means. Jesus adds another means in this passage. Unity. The church's unity authenticates the gospel. When unbelievers see how true believers love each other it serves as a proof that the Father sent the Son into the world. Unbelievers have never experienced a unity like believers. It is foreign to them. It is an unworldly unity. That is what Jesus is aiming at in our unity. A clear sign to the world that the Father sent Jesus Christ to save sinners.

### *The Big Idea...*

Jesus gives the church an unworldly unity so that the world may believe that the Father sent Him

- ☆ The Cause of Our Unity
- ☆ The Correspondence of Our Unity
- ☆ The Consequence of Our Unity

## I. The Cause of Our Unity

### **Where in the Bible does Jesus pray for you?**

Look at **v.20** "I do not ask for these only, but *also for those* who will believe in me through their word," R.C. Sproul has pointed out how special this verse is. He would ask his students "Where in the Bible does Jesus pray for you?"<sup>1</sup> Right here. In v.6-19, Jesus specifically prayed for His 11 disciples—Peter,

<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 330

Andrew, James and John and the rest (**Matthew 10:2-4**) But here in v.20, He says ‘I’m praying not just for the 11, but for single believer that was ever written in the lamb’s book of life (**Rev. 13:8**). Meaning that Jesus prayed for the towering figures of history like Augustine and Luther, but He also prayed for the most obscure believers whose life was full of unhistoric acts. Jesus is not a respecter of persons (**Acts 10:34**) If you belong to Him, He prayed for you. This includes not only every believer for the last 2,000 years, but for every believer yet to be born. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” (**Jer. 1:5**)<sup>2</sup>

### Three causes to our unity

So what is Jesus praying for us? Unity. v.21 “...that they may all be one.” I see three causes for our unity in Jesus’ prayer here. 1) Unity through belief. 2) Unity through the Word 3) Unity through glory

### Unity through Sola Fide

First unity through belief. Look at *how* Jesus prays. v.20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will *believe in me* [v.21] **that** they may all be **one**” Notice first that like v.9, Jesus is not praying for every single person in the entire world. He only prays for those who believe—that is those whom the Father has given Him. Notice secondly that Jesus prays for you because you simply believe. Jesus doesn’t pray for you because you are useful to Him. All the disciples in less than 24 hours were going to show themselves to be complete losers, abandoning Jesus as His most critical hour. They run away. John runs away naked as the soldiers catch him by his garment. Peter denies Jesus so violently that he curses. No. Jesus does not benefit from our services. “If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are

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<sup>2</sup> Dear congregation, that means that John 17 is a most precious gift for *your* prayer life. ‘Father, your Son prayed for *me*. And you are too good of a Father to ever deny His requests. So Father, grant that Jesus would be glorified in my life (v.10). Grant that I would have His joy fulfilled in myself (v.13). Grant that I would be kept from the evil one (v.15). Grant that I would be sanctified (v.17). Grant that I would be sent into the world to accomplish your purpose (v. 18).’

mine.” (**Psalm 50:12**) Jesus prays for you because you *believe*. v.20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will *believe in me*” Jesus prays for you because you “*believe in him who justifies the ungodly*” — **Romans 4:5**. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. Because it is a invincible fortress that defends the doctrine of justification by faith *alone*: “...to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,” When you put your trust in Jesus Christ, and surrender your soul to Him, and fall helplessly into His arms, all your ungodliness is swallowed up in the sea of forgetfulness. “As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.” (**Psalm 103:11**)

Dear congregation, this is the first reason we have unity with other believers. Jesus Christ has forgiven your many sins, freely through faith. You now can love much because you have been forgiven much.

### Unity “through their word”

Secondly, unity through the Word. The last part of v.20 is equally important. Jesus prays “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me *through their word*,” **Ephesians 4:5-6** says that we are called to “... **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism, **one** God and Father.” This oneness can only be achieved through the Word of God. Our belief has to be in accord with the Word of God alone. We cannot have unity apart from it.

That’s the connection between v.20 and v.21 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, **that** they may all be one.” The unity Jesus wants is not *merely* a “unity of love.”<sup>3</sup> It has often been argued that we should have church unity “*irrespective* of doctrine and practices.”<sup>4</sup> But Jesus just prayed in v.17 “Sanctify them in the truth; *your word is truth*.” Certainly Jesus is not praying ‘Father make them holy in Your Word,

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<sup>3</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 568

<sup>4</sup> The Reformation Heritage KJV Study Bible, Ed. Joel Beeke, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), pg. 1545

but don't let Your Word get in the way of unity.' The Bible commands us not to unify ourselves to those who forsake the truth.

**Romans 16:17** "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; *avoid them.*"

This is the second reason we have unity with other believers. The apostolic word which is what Jesus is pointing to here is the instrumental cause of the salvation of every soul for the last two thousand years. It's through this Word that believers are knit together.<sup>5</sup>

### Unity through glory

Thirdly, unity through glory. Look at **v.22** "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, *that* they may be one even as we are one," What is Jesus saying here? [Please turn to 2 Cor. 4:6] This doesn't mean that Jesus gave us the glory that belongs to God alone. **Isaiah 42:8** "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other," This glory that Jesus gives in v.22 is best understood from **2 Corinthians 4:6** "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," [Paul is referring to Gen. 1:3 when God in the beginning saying "let there be light"] has shone in *our hearts* to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Paul is speaking of the new birth here. The *only comparison* that is worth making to the new birth is the creation of the cosmos. Imagine the pitch black universe at the dawn of time. **Genesis 1:2** says

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<sup>5</sup> Paul uses the strongest language possible for those who preach false gospels. **Galatians 1:9** "As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed." We have a Christian duty to be intolerant towards false gospels in the church. False gospels enslave people. Paul made this clear later in his letter to the Galatians. "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." (**Galatians 3:10**) We have an Christian duty to be intolerant towards all false gospels in the church just as Paul opposed Peter in the book of Galatians. The gospel is discovered in God's word alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, all to the glory of God alone. This is the cause of our unity.

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.” The cosmos was dark and disordered. Then God said “Let there be light” and we read for the first time in the universe that God saw something good. **Genesis 1:4** “And God saw that the light was *good*.” This is the imagery Paul is drawing from in **2 Cor. 4:6**. Like the universe before God created light, your human soul was dark and disordered and full of death. And then God shone the light of Jesus Christ who is the glory of God into your heart, and you were transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Conversion is such a cataclysmic event that the only thing worth comparing it to is when light *itself* was created.<sup>6</sup>

When this happened to you dear believer, you were instantly united to Christ. **v.23** says “I *in* them and you *in* me,” And this union to Christ instantly united you to every other believer that ever has or every will live. The end of **v. 23** says “that they may become perfectly *one*.” Because your conversion is supernatural, so is your unity to the rest of the body of Christ. This is not a unity that the church has to conjure up. Unity is an present reality. **Romans 12:5** “so we, though many, are **one body** in Christ, and individually members one of another.” **Galatians 3:27-28** “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all *one in Christ Jesus*.”

## II. The Correspondence of Our Unity

### The unity between Father and Son determines our unity

So now the question is, what does our unity look like? Our unity *corresponds* with the unity that the Father and Son share. Jesus uses the

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<sup>6</sup> Oh how often we as evangelicals talk lightly of conversion. As if it rested on mere human decision. Conversion is not a formula. Conversion cannot be reduced to asking Jesus into your heart. Conversion can't be reduced to raising your hand, bowing your head and repeating a prayer after the preacher. You have just as much power to create light itself as you do to convert your own soul. Conversion is Jesus taking the glory of the Father—meaning “the gospel revelation of God that He gave us through the mediation of Christ”—and pouring it into your soul. **v. 22** “The glory that you have given me I have given to them,”

language of “*just as*” and “*even as*.” Look at v.21 “...that they may all be one, *just as* you, Father, are in me, and I in you, [v.22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one *even as* we are one,” So our unity corresponds with the unity of the Father and the Son. In this prayer we see five clear components of the Father and the Son’s unity that the church shares.<sup>7</sup>

### 1. The Father and Son are united in one purpose: Worship

Look at v.1 “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,” The Son came to planet earth *ultimately* to show the world the greatness of His Father. As we saw last week, Jesus came to *mainly* to make worshippers of God, that the world would taste and see that the Lord is good. And the church is united in this one purpose: that “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) All true believers are united in this one desire that God would be glorified.

### 2. The Father and Son are united in one mission: Redemption

In order to create worshippers, sinners would have to be redeemed and be given eternal life. The Father and Son were united in this one mission to save sinners. v.2 “you [Father] have given him [the Son] authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.” **John 3:17** “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” The church is united in this same mission. Jesus prayed in v.18 “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” All true believers are united in this same mission to see lost sinners be saved and reconciled to God.

### 3. The Father and Son are united in one truth: The Word

Jesus only spoke what the Father told Him to speak. **John 12:49** “For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago, IL,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 291

given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.” We see that same commitment in this prayer. **v.8** “For I have given them the words that you gave me,” The church is united in this same truth. The apostolic command for the last two thousand years has been “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (**2 Tim. 4:1-2**). All true believers are gathered around and united to God’s Holy Word.

#### **4. The Father and Son are united in holiness**

In this prayer Jesus addresses His Father as “*Holy Father*” (**v.11**) and “*Righteous Father*” (**v.25**). The Father is utterly holy. **Habbakuk 1:13** says “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong” Likewise when Isaiah saw the holy, holy, holiness of Jesus Christ sitting on the throne in Isaiah 6,<sup>8</sup> he felt himself coming undone. “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips,” (**Isaiah 6:5**) The church is united in this holiness. This is what Jesus prays for in **v.17** “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” And isn’t this the longing of every true believer’s heart? “God kill my sin. I loath it. Make me more like Jesus.” True believers hunger and thirst for this holiness.

#### **5. The Father and Son are united in love**

We’ll see this God-willing next week in **v.24**, Jesus says “Father...you *loved* me before the foundation of the world.” Love is not something that God does. God’s essential nature is love. God has never not loved. He never began to love. As long as God as been God, He has been love. **1 John 4:8** “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*.” This whole upper room discourse and the prayer that follows is framed by one statement that John made at the beginning of John 13. “When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having *loved his own* who were in the

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<sup>8</sup> John 12:41

world, *he loved them to the end*" (v.1) Jesus' love for the church echoes the Father's love. In **John 16:26-27** Jesus told his disciples "In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself *loves you*," True believers are united in this same love. Love for the saints is an essential mark of saving faith. **1 John 3:14** says "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death."

### **Dearer to you than your nearest friend**

John Newton—author of *Amazing Grace* and former slave ship owner in 18th century England—was once asked by another pastor to review a article he wrote in which he criticized the orthodoxy of another pastor. Newton responded in a letter entitled "On Controversy." It is the best short writing I've ever read on the subject. This is what Newton said

"If you account him a believer, though greatly mistaken in the subject of the debate between you, the words of David to Joab concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The Lord loves him and bears with him; therefore you must not despise him, or treat him harshly. The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show tenderness to others, from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. **In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon the earth is to you now.** Anticipate that period in your thoughts; and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ forever."<sup>9</sup>

Newton was not against correcting wrong views. Opposition in the church is often necessary as Paul opposed Peter in Galatians 2. The letter was not an attempt to stop correction. We all need correction. But Newton desired that this correction would be done in light of this unity that Jesus prayed for. And

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<sup>9</sup> Source: [https://www.opc.org/nh.html?article\\_id=217](https://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=217) accessed on September 23, 2017

Newton seizes upon a most amazing truth: “In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon the earth is to you now.”

Dear congregation, if you have lived long enough, no doubt you have been hurt by people in the church. The N.T is full of that same reality. Paul had to plead with the Philippians about the case of two women who were at such odds that Paul heard about it from prison. Their dispute was public knowledge. So he told them in **Philippians 4:2** “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women,” Paul admonition was that they agree in the Lord. Not that they would have all of their peculiar ideas be perfectly reconciled, but that being in the Lord, they would recognize that they are members of the same body, under the same head Christ. And no doubt there are people right now in this room who are at odds with professing believers. I would offer you the same truth that Newton told that pastor “In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon the earth is to you now.”

Believer you already possess a true unity with every other believer, because your unity doesn't rest on you or on anyone else. It rests on Christ.

### III. The Consequence of Our Unity

#### The apologetic Jesus prayed for

In this prayer Jesus gives two nearly identical reasons why He prays for this unity. **v.21** “*so that* the world may **believe** that you have sent me.” **v.23** “*so that* the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” The unity of the church is one of the *means* that God uses to persuade the world that the Father truly sent the Son, and that the Father loves us even as He loves His Son? How? What's the connection? [Let's turn to 2 Cor. 8]

We're asking the question: why does the church's oneness—it's common union or communion with each other have the effect of convincing the world of the authenticity of the gospel. Picking up in **2 Corinthians 8:1**

We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God that has been given** among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

Notice first in **v.2** that these were churches [plural] in Macedonia. This was not a localized phenomenon, but it was happening to several local churches. Secondly notice in **v.4** that the churches saw that the saints—presumably in Jerusalem were suffering greatly. They the apostles for the favor, the privilege of helping. But notice in **v.2** that they themselves were under a severe affliction, suffering great poverty. And yet **v.3** they gave beyond their own means, freely and **v.2** with an abundance of joy. Where does this come from? Paul says in **v.1** “We want you to know, brothers, about **the grace of God that has been given** among the churches of Macedonia.” This unworldly love came from the grace of God. These churches were utterly transformed by Christ.<sup>10</sup> And that is what the world sees: **transformation**. They see a a people who have been transformed. Being a part of the body of Christ is being transported to another spiritual dimension. **2 Cor. 5:17** “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” And this authenticates that the Father really did send Jesus Christ into the world. This authenticates the love that God has for His people because they in turn pour it out on each other. **John 13:35** “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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<sup>10</sup> Paul points to this immediately in **v.9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

How important is being unified in Christ? Well let me ask it differently? How important is it to share the gospel? To disciple the nations? This is the mission of the church. As John MacArthur says

“The loving unity of the church made visible is used by God to produce a desire on the part of unbelievers to experience that same love.”<sup>11</sup>

Dear congregation, unbelievers never experience this type of love. Because it’s a Divine love. That’s what Jesus says at the end of **v.23** “the loved them [the church] even as you loved me.” And when they actually see it from the church, God often uses it to convince them of the truth of the Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

## Application

### Our Doctrine: Unity doesn’t mean perfect agreement

We don’t create this unity—it was created the moment we were engrafted into Christ. But we are called to maintain it (**Eph. 4:3**) Maintaining our unity does not mean, as D.A. Carson says, “hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator.”<sup>13</sup> No true unity can be achieved that way, because as we saw in our text—unity can only come through the apostolic word. Not merely, the letters on the page, but the objective meaning behind them.

So the big question I have, is how do we maintain unity not only with each other, but with the universal church when major doctrines are at stake? Say between doctrines like Calvinism and Arminianism? How do we have unity

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<sup>11</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 293

<sup>12</sup> John MacArthur says “The church’s unity is the foundation of it’s evangelism.” John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 292

<sup>13</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), pg. 568

with brothers and sisters who disagree with us on this important issue? Because I believe that most of us have one of two proclivities. Either you...

- 1) You pursue theology without regard to loving others (Sectarianism)
- 2) You pursue loving others without regard to theology (Ecumenicalism)

Both of these positions are wrong. Paul says in **1 Cor. 13:2** that you if pursue theology without regard to loving others, you are worthless. “And if I... understand all mysteries and all knowledge...but have not love, I am nothing.” On the other hand, if you pursue loving others without regard to theology— Paul says you *can't* be loving. He tells Timothy in **1 Timothy 1:5** that doctrine is for love.<sup>14</sup>

In other words loveless doctrine is just as wrong as doctrine-less love. Or to say it another way intellectual elitism is just as wicked as anti-intellectualism. Those are not our only two choices. Jesus wasn't an elitist nor was He anti-intellectually.

No one cared more about theology than Jesus. (He turned over tables)  
No one loved people more than Jesus. (He loved prostitutes)<sup>15</sup>

So what does this look like for us? Because if we negotiate truth, the world will not believe our message. Penn Jillette, the magician of famed Penn and Teller, a renown atheist has no respect for Christians who negotiate the truth. He said “I don't respect people who don't proselytize. I don't respect that at all. If you

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<sup>14</sup> “The aim of our charge is love.” Aim is τέλος telos—it means design or purpose. The purpose of teaching right theology is for the purpose of love.

<sup>15</sup> No one cared more about theology than Jesus.

- a) It was His theology that drove Him to overturn tables in the temple (John 2:15)
- b) It was His theology that drove many disciples away (John 6:60-66)

2) No one loved people more than Jesus.

- a) It was His love that wooed the woman at the well (John 4)
- b) It was His love that caused Him to weep at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35)

believe there is a heaven and hell, and people could be going to hell...and you think it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward. "How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?"<sup>16</sup> Negotiating the truth does not convince the world.

But neither does the world convinced if we can't love each other because we can't agree on every jot and tittle. "Carnal divisions, strife, backbiting, and quarreling in the church drives unbelievers away."<sup>17</sup> "Who wants to join an institution that looks like the Jerry Springer *show*?"

So how do we have unity on issues like Calvinism and Arminianism? I use these examples because I think they are explosive enough to make the point.

First I believe that the doctrines of grace are essential to the health of the church because they most accurately explain the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ. Therefore I believe that Arminianism is inherently destructive to the gospel. Any system that says it depends partly on me, either my good choice or my humility undermines the grace of God. It removes our complete dependence upon God and therefore robs God of His glory. So as long as God is giving me grace, I will defend the doctrines of grace. And I hope you will do the same. But we must do this in absolute love. We must have a warm predestinarianism.

I believe this is why George Whitefield, the great evangelist during the First Great Awakening was so effective. George Whitefield was a Calvinist. He ardently preached the doctrines of grace. And he loved John Wesley who violently opposed the doctrines of grace. He refused to compromise on the doctrines of grace and he refused to stop loving His christian brothers who disagreed with him. And this often made him a target for both sides. It made him a target for the Arminians because they loathed his doctrine. And it made him a target for the Calvinists because they felt that "...his kindness in such

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<sup>16</sup> Source: <https://churchpop.com/2016/01/16/atheist-penn-jillette-christians-evangelize/> accessed September 23, 2017

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 293

relationships revealed a departure from the faith.”<sup>18</sup> This is how Whitefield responded to his Calvinist friends:

“Though I am a strenuous defender of the righteousness of Christ, and utterly detest Arminian principles, yet I know that God gave me the Holy Ghost before I was clear in either as to head-knowledge...My principles as to the fundamentals of the gospels are just the same as yours. I cannot renounce those precious truths, that I have felt the power of, and which were taught me not of man but of God. At the same time I would love all that love Jesus, though they differ from me in some points...If our brethren will quarrel with us, let us not quarrel with them. O my dear brother, I pray our dear Redeemer, to give you meekness to those who may not see so far as you do.”<sup>19</sup>

I think that captures the spirit of this passage. Whitefield defended the truth so that often his opponents were angry with him. Yet He loved his opponents so that often his friends were angry with him. May God grant us the same unity.

## Our Delight: The Father loves us as He loves the Son

The last part of **v.23** begs us to draw a little closer. Jesus prays “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and *loved them even as you loved me.*” The clear idea is that our unity will convince the world that the Father loves us believers even as He loves the Son. But I think Christians need to be convinced of that as well. I approach a text like this and it takes my breath away. I am inherently skeptical that it means what it seems to be saying. Is it true that the Father loves us even as He loves the Son? Is the gospel that good? Yes. Here are two arguments that the Father loves believers even as He loves the Son.

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<sup>18</sup> Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 143

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, pg. 143-144

1. **The Father's love for believers is eternal.** The verb is past tense "loved them even as you loved me." In v.24 Jesus says that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world. The Father's love for you dear believer is the same. He never began to love you. Just as He has loved Jesus for all eternity, so He has loved you for all eternity. **Jeremiah 31:3** "I have loved you with an everlasting love;"
2. **The Father loves you even as He loves Christ because you are in Christ.** That's the language of our passage. v.23 "I in them and you in me." You have been united to Christ. That means something. Ephesians 1 makes this so clear. Often people turn to Eph. 1 to prove predestination and election. And that is true. However, union with Christ is all the more on display:

v.3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

v.4 We are chosen "**in Him**"

v.5 We are adopted "**to Himself**"

v.7 We have redemption "**in Him**"

v.11 We have obtained an inheritance "**in Him**"

v.12 Our hope is "**In Christ**"

v.13 "**In Him**" we are sealed with the Holy Spirit

Beloved, you have been transferred into the very life of Christ. How could the Father not love you even as He loves Christ. You have been united to Him. Never to be separated. Always to be loved, wrapped up in the very life of God.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The Father's love for believers must correspond with His attributes. One of the mistakes that we often make concerning God is that we slice and dice up His attributes. 2 Tim. 2:13 says "[God] cannot deny Himself." Which means He cannot stop being all of His attributes. Which means His love towards you contains all the other attributes of God. Just like His love towards Jesus, His love towards you is every-where present. \_\_\_\_\_ Just like His love towards Jesus, His love towards you is unchanging. \_\_\_\_\_ Just like His love towards Jesus, His love towards you is infinite. \_\_\_\_\_

