

# Jesus' Prayer For Unity

No. 91

## Introduction.

I. Just a few hours before the death of Christ on the cross, He prayed these moving words to the Father.  
(Jn. 17:9-11, 20-23).

**JOH 17:9 "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; 10 and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 "And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are.**

**JOH 17:20 "I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. 22 "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.**

II. In this prayer Jesus asked that His followers be one as He and the Father are one.

A. Since perfect, complete harmony exists between God and His Son this means that Jesus wants perfect harmony, unity to exist among His followers.

B. He does not want His followers to be divided into hundreds of sects.

I. **Denominational World** - The denominational world seeks to mock this prayer for unity.

A. It teaches that man may join the church of his choice - that one church or one belief is as good as another.

1. It contends man can be saved in any church. It contends it does not matter what a person believes.

2. Some have gone so far as to thank God for the multiplicity of churches that exist so that man might choose the church of his choice.

B. **The evil results of this mockery of Christ's prayer are many fold.**

1. Denominationalism causes **division in the home**.
  - a. It often keeps families from worshiping and serving together.
  - b. **One time a little boy in a divided home asked his mother**, “Does God do all things well?” The mother replied, “Yes! He most certainly does.” The little fellow replied, “Then why didn’t God makes just one church so we could all go to church together?”
  - c. Not only does denominationalism keep families from worshiping and serving together, but it often causes the home to be torn by divorce. God alone knows the battles, the fights, the marriages that have ended because of religious conflicts.
2. Denominationalism **keeps many from being saved**. In Galatians 5:19 Paul listed factions and divisions among the works of the flesh. He said that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Christians must promote peace - not discord.
3. Denominationalism causes **infidelity**. (Jn. 17:20, 21).
  - a. The reason Jesus gave for unity is that the world might believe He was sent from the Father. The many conflicting doctrines in the religious world causes men to doubt Jesus was sent to the world rather than believe.
  - b. For example a man wants to know the truth on the subject of baptism. He asks one of his religious friends, **“Is it necessary to be baptized in order to be saved?”**
    - 1) He say “no” it is not necessary. You can be saved without baptism.
    - 2) He asks another friend who says, “It is absolutely necessary for salvation. It is only when you are baptized that you received the forgiveness of sins” He is now confused. He wonders why the difference, and begins to doubt there is anything to religion.
  - c. He asks another question, **“Has the kingdom been established?”**
    - 1) Some say “no” it has not . It is yet to come in the future.
    - 2) Others say it was established in 1914.
    - 3) Still others say it was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ in about 33 A.D.. This man is now even more confused and more doubtful.
  - d. This man asks other questions and receives conflicting answers. He finally comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to Christ and Christianity.
  - e. **Religious division is causing millions of people to become skeptics and infidels**.
    - 1) **One time a man in China said to a missionary**, “Why don’t you Christians go back to America and agree among yourselves? Then come to us and we will pay more respect to what you say.”

- 2) There is a lot of truth in that statement that should cause Christians to do some serious thinking about religious division. The price of a divided Christendom is an unbelieving, rebellious world. The price of a divided Christendom is a weakened church.

**II. The Bible Does Not Teach That One Church Is As Good As Another** - The Bible does not teach that one church is as good as another. (Eph. 4:4-6).

A. Paul begins this list of ones by saying there is “one body.”

1. Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**.
2. Observe Paul taught that the body and the church are one in the same. Since there is “one body” and the body and the church are synonymous, it means that there is but one church according to the word of God.

B. Some argue that the many denominations with their conflicting doctrines compose this one church.

1. They quote John 15:5 where Jesus said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” They contend that Jesus is the vine and the many denominations are the branches.
2. Let’s read this statement in context to see if this is what Jesus was saying. (Jn. 15:5, 6).

**<sup>5</sup>I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. ASV**

- a. It is very evident from this reading that Jesus was not talking about denominations, but He was talking about His disciples.
- b. He was saying that if His disciples do not abide in Him they will wither as a branch separated from the vine and withers. There is nothing said about denominations here. He is affirming that the disciples have no life apart from the Vine - Jesus Christ.

**C. To prove this doctrine indisputably false, let’s turn to 1 Corinthians 1:10.**

1. Paul appealed here for unity of mind, unity of speech and unity of organization.
2. This certainly does not sound like Paul believed that one church and one doctrine is as good as another.
3. Denominationalism is absolutely foreign to New Testament teaching.

**D. In Acts 4:32** Luke states that “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul.”

1. In the first century there was not a multiplicity of churches nor a multiplicity of doctrines, but believers constituted one body and preached and practiced one doctrine.

2. This is the way God wants the church today.

III. **Why Do We Have Denominations?** In view of these clear teachings on unity, some may ask, “Why do we have denominations?”

- **Eugene Milholland** answers this question with these words:

**“It is not what the Bible teaches that divides the world into religious groups, it is what the Bible does not teach that divides the world.”**

- In the religious world today many do not use the Bible as their sole source of authority.

A. Some use **personal feelings** as their authority in religion.

1. **Years ago an old gentleman told his congregation** that once every six months God let everyone that was in heaven look over the edge and see all those who were to come during the next six months. Asked about it the next day he readily admitted that he had made such a statement. The friend said, “Where do you get the authority for saying that? Where in the Bible do you find such a statement?” The old gentleman replied, “Why, the Lord bless you, brother, I don’t have any authority at all. I just know it - that’s all - I just know it.”
2. This man was basing his religion on his feelings rather than God’s revelation. God is not pleased with this kind of religion. He is only please when we have divine authority for everything we say and do in religion. (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 14:12; Jere. 10:23; Matt. 15:9; 1 Cor. 4:6; Col. 3:17; Rev. 22:18, 19).

B. Others are **guided by conscience**.

1. Conscience is sometimes defined as that small voice from within which either condemns or commends our behavior. Conscience is a good guide, but it can be wrong. It is influenced by teaching and environment and tradition.
2. The **Indian of colonial days** could kill a white man without feeling the slightest sense of guilt. He had been taught to regard killing a white man as an honor rather than a sin.
3. Men and women who have taught **pagan religious** often practice them with a clear conscience.
4. **Paul had a good conscience** when he persecuted Christians. (Acts 23:1). He later was convinced he had done wrong and became a follower of Christ.

C. Still others **follow the creeds of men** even when they contradict the Bible.

1. One prominent creed book teaches that a **man is either predestined to be saved or lost**. The Bible teaches (Jn. 3:16; Acts 10:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).
2. Another creed book say **sprinkling is baptism**.
  - a. The Bible says. (Rom. 6:4) Baptism is depicted as a burial. Baptisms were administered in rivers and other places where there was adequate water for immersion. We do not have a single

example of sprinkling or pouring.

b. Furthermore, the word “baptism” comes from the Greek word “baptizo” meaning “to immerse”.

D. Others accept **traditions** as their guide.

1. The **Council of Trent** decreed “that the oral traditions of the Catholic Church are to be received with equal piety and reverence as the books of the Old and New Testaments.” Council of Trent,

Fourth Session.

2. It is contended that Christ taught many things not recorded. This claim is based on John 21:25.

a. This verse refers to things Christ did - not to different teachings He gave. Jesus did many things not recorded in the gospel of John.

b. All of His teachings are found in the scriptures. (Jn. 14:26; 16:13; Acts 20:27).

#### IV. **The Word Of God Is To Be Our Sole Source Of Authority**

A. Instead of using these things as our source of authority in religion, the word of God is to be our sole source of authority. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:3).

B. It is only when we use the Bible as our only guide that we will have the unity for which Jesus prayed. Let us follow God’s revelation. Let’s have a “thus saith the Lord” for all that we do in faith and practice.

#### **Conclusion.**

I. You may be asking at this time “**How may I become a part of the church Jesus built and died for?**” Let’s turn to the word of God for the answer. (Mk. 16:16; 1 Cor. 12:13).

II. It is through faith and baptism that one becomes a part of the body (the church) for which Jesus died. It is through faith and baptism that one is covered by the precious, atoning blood of Jesus.

III. Will you come and give your life to Jesus and let Him save you and rule your heart? Come as we stand and sing.