

## Divine Unity

John 17: 11, 12, 20-26

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In venturing to read this well-known chapter the desire in one's heart is to say a word in relation to the outbreathings of the communications from the Son to the Father, concerning the work already accomplished, and concerning, too, a work that had yet to be accomplished, with its ultimate ending in glory.

In this chapter we have a remarkable summing up of the main items of divine truth which came to light in the ministry of our Lord, as contained in this remarkable gospel. We have not the intention of going into every detail, but ten times in this chapter we hear the Son saying "I have," each occasion referring to something He had done. Thus we find the various details of His ministry all brought together, all that the Son had done and all that He had made known on behalf of the Father, in His testimony in this world.

As an answer to that gracious ministry we read that six times the disciples are said to have certain things. What a blessed place we have been brought into! Here is the Son in all His greatness saying I have done this; I have said that; and He can speak of the disciples on the subjective side, in answer to what He had done, that "they have" received and done certain things. That is the position through grace, in which we are, however much or little we may appreciate it. It certainly suggests that, at the very outset, a response had been secured. There was a company who intelligently and in the power of the Spirit of God, had been impressed by what the Son had made known, and had responded to it in their affections. As a result, as He Himself tells us in the chapter, they glorified the Son.

I believe we are, every one of us, marked in some measure by the same features which were seen in that company. We know Him, believe on Him, love Him, serve Him; and these are the features which mark those of whom it is said "they have," and who would desire to move in this world to the glory of the Son.

But while we see this, and many more precious matters in this wonderful chapter, it is primarily the three unities in the verses that we read that were on one's mind to speak of. First that which the Spirit has produced in divine unity; secondly, a unity which is still continuing; thirdly a unity in relation to the future, and which is sure of accomplishment when, at the coming of the Lord, we shall be with Him and like Him in the glory. The first unity has passed away; the centre unity still abides; the third one awaits the day of glory, when those in the first unity, and those in the one that is still continuing, will be perfect for ever.

In verse 11 the Son is saying to the Father, "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father." In verse 25 we have the expression, *Righteous Father*," but in regard of His own the Lord says, "*Holy Father*, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou has given Me, that they may be one, as We." Now I understand that unity to be apostolic. In the company that surrounded the Lord on earth we see those who had received things that we could not possibly have today. John speaks about it later in his epistle, "that which we have heard" — something which was audible, and they were capable of hearing it; "which we have seen" — something visible, and they were capable of seeing it; "which we contemplated" — something understandable, and they had understood it; "and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life" — something tangible (1

John 1: 1, New Trans.). They were actually in company with the Son of God, both before and after His death on the cross; they knew Him in the conditions in which He was found in this world, in perfect Manhood, on behalf of God. Flesh and blood conditions before the cross, flesh and *bones* after the cross, but the same blessed Person, a Man, audible, visible, understandable, tangible, through whom this wonderful revelation was given. Given in such wise that men in flesh and blood condition (not *by flesh and blood*, but *while in flesh and blood condition*) as having the Spirit and as born of God, can take in today as divine revelation, and in measure answer to the wonderful things which have been passed on, as we read, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." And here we are, recipients of these divine things, through the men who had them at first hand as in company with the Son of God, and who maintained them in "Holy" conditions in the interests of the Father, so that they might be preserved for our response to them today. So we have this first unity, formed in the power of the Spirit of God, those that the Father had given Him, and He prays that they might be one, "as We are."

When here the Son could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," and here are men in nature, and life, and character, so like the Son in the passing on of these things, that in the unity which existed amongst them there was no divergence in the testimony and the light which they passed on. They were one, unified by the Spirit, unified in their testimony, one "as We are" — the Son in unity with the Father. Quite beyond their comprehension there existed a link between the Son and the Father in Deity. But these men were called of God, and empowered of God, to maintain a testimony to the truth in this world during the absence of the Son. There was a unity formed by the Spirit, an apostolic unity, and we hear the Son as He prays to the Father that this unity might be maintained, to the end that, in the interests of the Father (as the Son had ever been engaged in the interests of the Father) they might lay the foundation of Christianity in this world.

In verse 12 we read, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them," the word is "guarded them," guarded them "in Thy name; those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the Son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." He laid His preserving hand upon them, His preserving presence was ever with them; but now He was going away. He was leaving them, but He leaves them in the care of the Father up there, and in the care of the Spirit down here, that they still may be guarded, and the truth may be guarded, in order that the continuation of the testimony in divine unity might go on in this world as it does today. That is the apostolic unity, formed by the Spirit, in order that the testimony, and the truth of these things might be communicated to others. How wonderful indeed that the apostles were kept in this unity of the faith, in an apostolic way, and that we have their testimony in its purity in the Word of God today.

Some years ago I was asked to read a book called "The Rival Philosophies of Paul and Christ." I said, "Are you seriously recommending a book like that to me? Is not the truth of the body one of the main items of the Pauline gospel? And does Paul not tell us that Christ is Head of the body?" And I went over some further aspects of Paul's ministry. "Can Paul be a *rival* when he puts at the head of every divine truth of which he speaks, the very Christ you say he rivals?" No. Thank God there is no rivalry. Nor was there in any of these apostles. They stood together with this one objective, to glorify the Son as the Son's one objective had ever been to glorify the Father, and in that apostolic unity we have the truth presented to us today.

The apostolic unity as such has ended, but thank God, the results of it are preserved to us today. The Lord says in verse 20, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." It has sometimes been said that this unity has long since been broken. I do not

believe it for one moment. There is a unity here of the Spirit that will never be broken; it matters not what has happened on the surface of things. This unity is discipular; the one we have already spoken of is apostolic, but I am persuaded that the unity of verse 21 is as inviolate as the unity of verse 11. It does not say that all will be unified in one so-called church. What it says is "that they also may be one in Us." Could we meet a *true believer* anywhere, whatever name he may bear outwardly, who does not believe in the Father, and in the Son? I believe that wherever the gospel has been received, and wherever this apostolic testimony has been made good in the heart of any believer in the power of the Spirit of God, such believers are still being maintained in this unity, in the Father, and in the Son. The end in view is "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." We often meet people in whose circles we may not be able to move, but we tell them that we belong to the Lord, and they say "thank God, and so do we." We have heard people preaching the gospel, maintaining the one divine testimony, "That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." These are terms, together with other terms we might use, which shew the unity mentioned here. It is not one and the same *persuasion*; not oneness in the same so-called church; but it is one in the *Father*, and one in the *Son*. It matters not what the saint of God may call himself, or in whatever circles he may move; if he truly confesses to this truth, he is bound to be one with us in the Father and one in the Son.

Now that is the testimony which is being rendered; not the ecclesiastical unity that was set up and which, as we well know, is sadly broken. The spiritual unity never will be broken. All that is seen in the Son objectively; all that the Spirit of God subjectively secures in answer to that, is in order that the testimony today might still be maintained, "One in Us that the world may believe." Believe what? "That Thou hast sent Me." It is a unity of testimony. Would you accredit a man as a believer who was not unified in that testimony? I am sure you would not; neither would I. And would you refuse to accept a man as a believer, wherever he may go, if he truly believed in the Father, in the Son, and accepted the testimony "That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world?" I believe that is the testimony in simple language; and I believe that the unity spoken of in verse 21 has never been broken, and never will be broken. The Spirit will maintain it in the heart of every true believer, and will maintain it until the coming of our Lord. That then is a unity in testimony to this world, "that the Father sent the Son," and that Christ died upon the cross, in order that men might be recovered and brought to God, whatever may be the terms in which that testimony goes forth.

In verse 22 the Lord says, "And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one." This I believe lies in the future; it is a unity to which we are going on, and which will unify not only the company mentioned in verse 21, but also the company of verse 11, when at the Lord's coming again all shall meet Him in the glory. Not only are we called to share the pathway of His rejection, and to bear witness that the Father sent Him as Saviour, but we shall be taken out from the scene of testimony into that scene of glory where *all* His own will be like Him in that glory which the Father has given to Him. "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me." In John 14 believers are said to be in the Son, who is Himself in the Father. That is present enjoyment of the Father's love, in the sphere of eternal life; in the Son, who is in the Father. In chapter 17 we have it presented the other way, the Father in the Son, and the Son in the saints. It is what will be seen in a future day, the Father coming into display through the Son, and the Son coming into display through the saints. I am persuaded that it is in this company that the display of the glory of the Son of God in the world to come will be seen, "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one," (verse 23). What an end to which we are going!

An apostolic unity, formed by the Spirit, has brought the light of these things to us; a unity still

being maintained by the Spirit so that testimony to the Son might be given to this world, and a unity in all its completeness in the glory, when at His coming we shall share in that *Manhood* glory which is His now in the place to which He has already gone. In that day testimony so far as we are concerned, will be no longer needed; in the shining of that light it is no longer said that the world might believe, but "that the world may *know* that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." This is something we know and can enjoy today, but it will soon be manifestly displayed to the world, in that wonderful day of glory to which through grace we are moving.

Then we further read, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me," verse 24. We are to be like Him and with Him in that place to which He has gone, and we shall then behold a glory that apparently we do not see today. It has been rightly said that we need to be like Him in His glory to see Him as He is, and that is what John says in his epistle, "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is, 1 John 3: 2. And so verse 24 continues, "that they may behold My glory, which thou hast given Me; for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world."

Whatever that glory may be that the Father has given Him, doubtless something connected with the peculiar place in the Father's affections that was ever the portion of the Son, the moment is coming when we shall have the privilege of gazing upon it and understanding probably a little more deeply the wonderful love wherewith the Father loves the Son, a love wherewith He loved Him before time began.

Thus we reach the end of this wonderful utterance, "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee; but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me," verse 25. The world must await the display of this, but it is known to us today. Oh, that we valued it more! all that the Spirit has formed in relation to a company to whom the Father's Name has been declared. "Have declared it" — would probably refer to the Lord's testimony in this world; "and will declare it" may be that *added* message through Mary on the morning of His resurrection.

In this unity in testimony, formed by the Spirit, we are found today; left here to bear witness to the Father and to the Son; one in the Father, one in the Son. That testimony will go on until the unity in glory is manifested. The Lord keep us in it, not merely intelligently, but in the power of divine love. That is what I think comes out at the end; that which gives impetus to the testimony, "That the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," is that same love shining out in us and in our testimony to the Son today.