



WnL CONNECT GROUPS

Unity in the Church

John 17:20-26

MAIN POINT

Unity among Christians gives a common witness to the world and is faithful stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- What are some groups or places in which you have a strong sense of community? (Ex: alma mater, favorite team, town, family, clubs or civic organizations, etc.)
- What about those groups makes it so easy for people to connect?
- Do you think it's easier or more difficult for people to connect to a church than it is to connect to other groups? Why?

The church is unlike any other organization or group in history because it brings together people across ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, the unity of the church is one of the most powerful witnesses we have as to the power of the gospel.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read John 17:20-26.

- What is the central theme of Jesus' prayer in these verses?

Jesus prayed for believers' oneness with God (vv. 21-23); by believers' unity the world will know God sent Jesus (v. 23); God loves believers just as God loves His Son (v. 23); believers will be with Jesus and see His glory (v. 24); God's love is to be in believers (v. 26).



Jesus asked the Father that all future believers be one in the same way the Father was in the Son and the Son was in the Father. When Christian fellowships are divided today, people may wonder whether Jesus' prayer was practical or powerful.

- If all you knew about unity was based on these verses, how would you define Christian unity?
- What is the result of unity among believers?
- How can believers apply the truths from these verses as an individual? As a class? As a church?

Jesus' high priestly prayer shows His deep concern for unity among His followers. Unity is not sameness. Unity does not mean holding the same opinions and agreeing on every matter. Unity among Christians means loving one another with Jesus' love, obeying His commands, and working together in His redemptive mission. Love for Jesus, faithfulness to Him, and a sense of needing one another to do His work will unite His people for maximum effort for Him. In Ephesians 2-3, Paul speaks about the purpose of the church and cooperation among all types of believers.

Have a volunteer read Ephesians 2:11-18.

- Before Jesus came, what problems did the Gentiles face (vv. 11-12)? How do those images compare to your personal history?
- What are the main issues that keep various groups separated in today's churches?
- What is the change that results because of the "But now" statement in 2:13? What does this statement mean to you?

Paul wrote that Gentiles, who had once been separated from God and excluded from His covenant people, had now been brought into God's new people—the church—through the death of Jesus. Today, we are called to recognize that at conversion we have been brought into God's family. As a result, we have enormous privileges.

- How has Christ destroyed hostility and made peace possible for all people (v. 14)?
- According to verses 14-18, what are the positive results of this wall coming down? Which one is the most significant to you and why?

The subject of Paul's message in verses 11-18 is that through His death Jesus "tore down the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14) between believing Jews and Gentiles, causing them to be at peace with one another as one new people of God. This happened because when Christ came, He proclaimed the good news of peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near. As a result, unity (v. 14) and peace (v. 16) are possible in our relationships with others, and we all have access to the Holy Spirit's power (v. 18).



Have another volunteer read Ephesians 2:19-22.

Christ achieved and announced peace. Now we see the result of that peace. Gentile believers have become citizens of God's kingdom. Paul used additional descriptions to speak about how we are to understand our relationship to other believers.

- What three images did Paul use to help believers understand their unity in Christ? Which of Paul's analogies best helps you understand your relationship to other believers? Why?
- How do we express that we are part of God's earthly dwelling place? How can we positively express our connection with other Christians and churches?
- How would we relate to others in the church if we truly recognized that God's Spirit was present? What are the implications of this reality?

As Paul concluded this section of his letter, he emphasized the ongoing process by which Jesus is building His church. God dwells in each believer by His Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20) and thus collectively in the church as the assembly of all believers (1 Cor. 3:16). Nothing gives more significance to the church than the fact of God's residing in His people. He does not dwell in buildings; rather His people are His temple. God desires that you live out your spiritual commitment and fulfill Christ's divine plan.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- How are you encouraged by Jesus' prayer for the church? How does it affect the way you approach prayer?
- What will you do this week to relate to other believers in ways that express your unity in Christ?
- What are some of the unique challenges we face as we practice biblical community? How can we respond to these challenges?

PRAYER

Spend some time thanking God for Jesus' intercessory prayers on our behalf. Thank Him for the hope and common witness we share with all believers of all generations. Pray that God would open our hearts to truly understand what it means to be unified with all Christians in the church. Pray that He would break down any walls we have built up toward other believers, that we might be a united witness to a lost world.

