

John 17:20-26 – “The Final Apologetic”

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Intro: If Jesus had never come; if the Church had never been called out of the world, what would our world look like today? We need not guess. We only need to look to the parts of the world that have little witness to the life of Jesus. It would look like the oppression of North Korea. It would look like the violence of militant Islam. It would look like the hopeless religion of Hindu India. It would look like the tribal paganism of Irian Jaya. Only in each case, it is certain to be worse than it is today, just as human society came to the dregs in Noah’s day. Without the light of the World shining into the darkness our world would be more violent; more oppressive; and more hopeless. You wouldn’t want to live here if Jesus hadn’t come and called His Church into existence. Tonight, we’re going to listen in as Jesus prays for His Church. How do we know that the Father sent the Son? We know because the people of God are in union with the Father through the Son. It is the union of God’s people with the Father through the Son that is “The Final Apologetic,”¹ the final persuasive argument that God loves and saves through the Gospel. Changed lives are the witness of the Father’s presence in the Son and His Church and the millions whose lives have been changed by this message have brought light into every corner of our world in the two-thousand years since Jesus’ ascension. Let’s be clear: the world chooses to ignore this apologetic. Nevertheless, the testimony is clear. Jesus has come into the world, sent by the Father, and in the work of Christ on the cross, the works of the devil have been once and forever undone. In Eden, Satan fractured Man’s unity; robbed his glory; and denied the love of God for His children. On the cross, Jesus reversed forever all those works, putting unity, glory, and love within man’s reach, as we’ll see tonight.

Proposition: Through our union with Christ, the Church is evidence to the world that the devil’s work in Eden has been undone.

Billboard: (vv.20-21) Restored Union
 (vv.22&24) Restored Glory
 (vv.23&25-26) Restored Love

(vv.20-21) Restored Union – In Eden, the union between God and Man, and between men with each other, fractured. Jesus came to restore the union of God and His people. **John 17:20–21 - 20** “*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*” In these verses we listen to Jesus praying for His Church. The prayer encompasses all believers in every age since the apostle’s time. While it is the Church that Jesus is praying for, each individual believer is being prayed for at the same time, for the Church is simply the scattered children of God gathered under the banner of the cross. How have these come together into Christ’s Church? By believing in Christ through the apostle’s doctrine. Something supernatural happens in the soul of the elect man or woman whenever the gospel is preached. Life is created by the Holy Spirit and hearts are changed. Sins are forgiven and the family relationship between God and man, fractured in the Garden, is once and forever restored. Not only is the relationship between God and Man restored, but the damage sin has done between man and man has been undone. That is why Jesus

¹ Title courtesy of Francis Shaeffer

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prayed in verse 21, “*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you.*” It is important for us to notice that this restored union among men is only possible because of the restored union between God and Man that Jesus accomplished on the cross. We often overlook this essential fact, and when we do that, we are in danger of thinking that Jesus’ prayer was merely for *organizational* union, rather than its true purpose of *organic* union. This unity is so important because it is “The Final Apologetic,” the last convincing argument that the Father sent the Son, as Jesus prayed in this verse. When lives are changed through receiving the gospel; when the fact of our union with the Father becomes evident through our faith in the Son, the world is confronted with an argument it cannot answer, because the life of God pulses into the world through the people of God. Men may not accept this witness, as verse 25 will tell us. Nevertheless, something supernatural occurs that cannot be denied by any impartial witness: God and His people have been reunited, and the people of God from every tongue, tribe, kindred, and nation have been united under the banner of the cross.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Our unity proves that the divisive work of the devil in the Garden has been undone in the Church.

[ILLUSTRATION] One of the most effective ways to defeat an enemy is to destroy the unity of its army. Have you noticed in the Old Testament how many times God defeated the enemies of His people by causing them to turn their swords on their own fellow soldiers? That is exactly what the devil did in the Garden of Eden. He sought to turn God against Man and Man against God and his fellow man. You must admit, his plan has been working rather well among mankind right up to the present day. But in Jesus, God has restored the union between God and Man and men. And that is why, it is important for the Church to reflect this unity in our world today.

[APPLICATION] I want to stress that the union we are talking about goes far beyond mere *organizational* union. Sometimes we get the idea that if the Church would just get its act together – if there weren’t so many denominations; furious disagreements over minor doctrinal issues; conflicting opinions over worship styles, financial matters, carpet colors, or whatever – if we could just get our act together, all would be well, and we could win the world to Jesus. But that is mistaking *uniformity* for *union*. Frankly, that isn’t what Jesus is praying about. God loves variety and so should we! And it’s true that our aim should be to live in peace with all mankind, in so far as it lies within our power to do so. Fussing and fighting among believers is not an asset when it comes to reaching the world for Christ. But Jesus is not praying here for *uniformity*, but for *union* – the life of God pulsing through the people of God because those people are *organically* connected to Him and each other through Jesus. It is the union of the vine that Christ is primarily asking for – that the branches would be so closely in fellowship with Him that they would produce beautiful fruit together for His glory. The secret of organic union is for each branch to stay closely connected to the Vine, my friends. When each branch is drawing its life from the Vine, union of purpose, power, and productivity is a snap – no matter what particulars you prefer. How are you doing at staying close to the Savior? In the Church, those who are close to the Savior cannot be distant from each other.

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(vv.22&24) Restored Glory – In Eden, the glory of God and man was hidden; obscured. That is why Jesus prayed in these verses for the restoration of both the inner glory of man, and the outer glory of God.

John 17:22 - 22 *The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one....* **John 17:24 - 24** *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me*

where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Jesus prayed in verse 22 concerning the restoration of Man’s inner glory, his inner perfection.

Theologians have spilled much ink trying to understand exactly what Jesus meant to say in verse 22.

What is the glory that He has given to believers? Some think it is the likeness of God. Others hold that it is the power of God. Still others believe that it is the immortality of God that is imparted. Closer to the truth, perhaps are those who teach that it is unity of heart and mind between the believer and God that is intended. But there is one suggestion that takes in all these good gifts at once, and to my mind is the most persuasive. In this verse, the glory Jesus gives to His followers is the same inner glory that He himself received at His baptism: the Holy Spirit. That must be why Jesus concluded the verse by saying, *“that they may be one, even as we are one.”* It is our union with God through the coming of His Spirit that brings us all these good gifts in fullness. This is the inner glory that Jesus requested the Father to pour out on His people when He ascended back into heaven (cf. John 14:16). And how can we hope to display the unity Christ prayed for unless we are united with Him through the presence of His Spirit in our hearts? So, Jesus prayed for the inner glory of man to be restored. But in verse 24 He also prayed for the outer glory of God to be manifested to His people. This “outer glory” or “shekinah glory” of God (as we’ve seen previously in our study or verses 1-5) was veiled in Jesus when He took up *“the likeness of human flesh”* in the incarnation. Now Jesus prayed that we may see this glory He asked the Father to restore to Him at His ascension. There is a precious truth here. In the Garden, Man and God could freely associate because Man was without imperfection. Adam and Eve could stand in God’s presence naked and unashamed because there was no sin in them. They could enjoy God’s glory as they walked with Him in the cool of the Garden because sin had no place in them. But when sin came in, Man was cast from God’s presence and could no longer enjoy the glory of God face-to-face. Now Jesus prayed for that damage to be undone.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Our union with God through Christ undoes the work of the devil which robbed us of glory.

[ILLUSTRATION] Our Bible tells us that it is *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (cf. Colossian 1:27). It is a glorious thing that God has put His Son’s life in each believing heart through the presence of the Holy Spirit. What an honor! What audacious boldness on God’s part!

[APPLICATION] Because the Spirit lives in our hearts we can now both reflect God’s glory through our lives and enjoy God’s glory in His presence one day. Dear ones, this calls for worship. God’s generosity to us is amazing, to say the least. Sometimes, we just need to enjoy it. We just need to savor it. We just need to bask in the glory of our union with Him. We don’t deserve it, but He has given it to us anyway. Amazing grace; unending love.

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(vv.23&25-26) Restored Love – In Eden, God’s love for Man was denied. The devil’s dastardly slander against God to our first parents was, “God doesn’t really love you.” No wonder, then, that in these verses Jesus prayed for God’s love toward Man to once again be affirmed. **John 17:23 – 23** *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....* **John 17:25–26 - 25** *O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me.* **26** *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*” In verse 23 Jesus first prayed for God’s love for Man to be manifested through the union of believers with God in the Church. The Church is the dwelling place of God and Man. Nothing could give such clear evidence of God’s love for Man as God’s acceptance of Man into His family and coming to dwell with Man through our union with Him in Jesus Christ. God proves to the world that He loves us by putting us in union with Jesus and each other. This is a witness that the world will not receive, as verse 25 shows us. The world cannot receive this apologetic because it does not know God. But those who believe know that the Father has sent the Son because of His love for Man, and in verse 26 this love of God for Man Jesus asks the Father to instill in the hearts of His disciples, “*that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*” The love that is being spoken of isn’t our love for God, but rather God’s love for us just as He loved Jesus, His Son. Jesus asked the Father to manifest His love for us through our union with Him; He asked the Father to instill in our hearts the certainty of that love for us.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Our union with God through Christ undoes the devil’s work of denying God’s love.

[ILLUSTRATION] When a child is unsure of a parent’s love, life becomes chaotic and painful.

[APPLICATION] Perhaps the most damaging thing the devil accomplished in the Garden was destroying Man’s confidence in God’s love for him. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost all our difficulties flow from our uncertainty concerning God’s love for us. Because we doubt God’s love, we might question His goodness, feel insecure of our salvation, or find it hard to love Him as we know we ought. But here in these verses we find relief for our troubled souls. Think about this, dear one: Jesus has prayed for you to receive the inner assurance of God’s love. He has asked the Father to use you as an example of His love before a watching world. I want to emphasize this again: *Jesus has prayed for you* – for His Church collectively and for you as an individual. Is there any possibility that the Father will fail to answer the Son’s request? Surely not! If you are wondering if God really loves you, I want to encourage you to place yourself by faith entirely in the arms of Jesus in this matter. Reflect on the assurances of God’s love in His Word. Meditate on them. Pray over them. Call to mind often the picture of Jesus, the night He was betrayed, praying for you to receive the knowledge of God’s love. Do not stop seeking this blessing on your knees until you can rise with the happy shout of the finder. God has this for each one of His children. And how desperately we need it!

Conclusion: If Jesus had never come; if the Church had never been called out of the world, what would our world look like today? But Jesus *has* come! And because that is true, our world is not what it would have been if left alone. The Church, the Body of Christ, is “The Final Apologetic” testifying that the

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Father sent the Son. Union with God is again possible. Glory is once more within reach. Love is offered to all who believe. And the evidence? Our unity with God the Father, through Jesus the Son. May God grant that His grace would be visible in each of our lives to the praise of His glory and the transformation of our world.