

The Ministry of Prayer VII

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that they may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

John 17:20-23

What a beautiful prayer this is. Read it a couple times and just get a glimpse of the passion in the heart of Jesus. He loves you. He was praying for you in the Garden of Gethsemane before his death. He prayed for everyone who would believe in the message that his disciples would preach and the message that would come down through the ages that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and has come to seek and to save those who are lost. His prayer is for a type of oneness that the world cannot come to. He prayed that this unity would be held together by the reality that he would be in us and we would be in him. That is so wonderful and so powerful. We can do this. We can be a people who believe and leave worldly things to become one body.

Paul said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery but I’m talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).” Here is a prayer that you and I need to be praying all the time. Jesus wants the message of the gospel and the indwelling presence of his Spirit to bring us to complete unity. He wants to see a oneness in us as the church that will testify to the world that Jesus is alive! Are we there yet? No.

Why is this unity so hard to realize? Because we have an enemy and unfortunately we can exemplify his characteristic of division and self centeredness better than the complete unity that Jesus stands for. It’s so easy to be negative and to put others down. We do it all the time. Just listen to what your mouth says in one day. James calls the tongue a restless evil (James 3:8). But this grieves the heart of the Holy Spirit. We cry out for healing and power and gifts and his presence and the Spirit cries out for unity. The Holy Spirit is all about this prayer of Jesus. Let me ask you a question, will He bring us His gifts if we are not going to get rid of selfish ambition?

I was sitting with another pastor this past Wednesday morning. We were talking about his previous church. It was a multi-cultural environment with great worship and purpose. The church was growing and being effective. Then the factions started. There were rifts in the leadership and division in the body. Before long the people started to leave and one day he came to church to find the door locked. Gone, what once was a promising congregation, gone. It’s a familiar story. I have been in the church all my life. My dad was a pastor and I’ve been pastoring for over twenty years. It’s grievous, but for some reason it does not seem to stop. One day folks, one day we will finally stop our bickering and be the answer that Jesus is looking for. Then the world will know that the Father sent the Son. Let’s join with the prayer of Jesus. Let’s pray for complete unity!