

The Union of the Trinity; Our Union in the Trinity – *John 17:20-26*

- *Life in the Trinity #2*

Introduction – “The living God is not a solitary God. The living God is not an isolated God. From all eternity the living God has lived in relationship – indeed, has lived as relationship. At the center of the universe is relationship. From all eternity the living God has been community, family. From all eternity the living God has been infinitely pleased as Father, Son and Holy Spirit” – D. Johnson, in “Experiencing the Trinity”. In the priestly prayer of John 17, Jesus prays in light of the union which He enjoys with the Father (and by implication and other verses, the Spirit) that His followers would enter into that same union with Him and with one another.

One With the Triune God (John 17:20-26) – There is a union among the Persons of the Trinity, and Jesus asks the Father that we would be brought into that same union. This is something far more than simply being “of the same mind,” and it is certainly not the kind of union where we become a part of God. I would argue that it is the union of covenant-love which has always existed between Father, Son, and Spirit.

For All Who Will Believe – Jesus’ prayer turns to the whole eschatological church. Our union with Jesus Christ is by the Holy Spirit and not by being with Him physically as His disciples were at that time. It was better that Jesus leave (through His sacrificial death and justifying resurrection) that He might send the life-giving Spirit (John 16:5-15).

Mutual Indwelling – The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father (v21), and Jesus prays that God would cause us to be one in Them as well. This was illustrated by the Vine and the branches in 15:1ff. The covenantal union that we are to enjoy is a union which already exists in the Father, Son and Spirit. Similarly, in v23 we see Jesus praying for that union, “I in them, and You in Me,” and the goal is a perfected oneness in love. There is a union of love that has existed before the foundation of the world (v24) and Jesus prays that His disciples enter into that union.

The Holy Spirit – I keep mentioning the Spirit, but He is not mentioned in this passage in particular. But there is a glory which was bestowed upon Christ from the Father which Jesus has given His followers (v22). The believers are the New Temple, the new dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, where the glory of the Lord resides. The Spirit of God is the one who actualizes God’s indwelling love and glory in the Christian (1 John 4:13-16). “God is love,” and Augustine, speaking of the Trinity said, “God is at once the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself.”

Eschatological, Evangelical Purpose – Jesus prays this, “that the world may believe that You sent Me...” (v 21), and “that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved (His disciples) as You have loved Me” (v23). Notice that Jesus is praying that the Father will give this to us; this is a kind of unity explicable to the world only on the basis of divine love, transcending all human unity. The world has not known the Father (v25), but Jesus has declared His name, and will do so through His disciples (v26, cf Matt 28:18-20). In Matthew we are told that Jesus will be *with us* always. In John we are told that He will be *in us* always.

One In Us – “Covenant” is not a term for theologians. Covenant is the reason, the only reason, you have a relationship with God. It is because of the covenant-nature of God that you are in Him and He in you. And in covenant, we learn about the Triune God – for the persons of the Triune Godhead have been in covenant with one another eternally. Ralph Smith has said, “The covenant is a revelation of the very life of the triune God. Covenant means relationship, and the essence of the covenant relationship is love.” Thomas Torrance said, “The doctrine of the Trinity gives expression to the fact that.... God has opened himself to us.....God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to himself within the circle of his knowing of himself.”

Life in the Trinity – When we are brought into this union with God, we are brought into life, a community, a family of relationships. We join a work already in progress –

As Disciples of Christ, we join the Trinity in giving love, honor, and glory to God – The Father loves and is pleased with the Son (Matt 3:17). The Son loves and sings praise to the Father (Heb 2:12). And the Spirit comes upon us, filling us with His passion to glorify the Father and the Son (John 16:12-15).

As Disciples of Christ, we join the Trinity in giving love, honor, and glory to one another – This is why you cannot say that you love God while hating your brother (1 John 4:7-8). To participate in the love of the Trinity is to participate in a love for those in covenant with Him as well. This is all the work of God in us, of grace working in and through us.

As Disciples of Christ, we join the Trinity in mission to the world – The Father did not send the Son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved (John 3:17). The Spirit was given to the church in order that the gospel would go to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together in the salvation of the world; the declaration of the gospel, the mercy and love we show the world, are in concert with the work of the Triune God who loves to give praise to the glory of His grace (Eph 1:6).