

## THE CHURCH OF CHRIST (2)

### JESUS' PRAYER FOR UNITY

Ride up and down the streets of any city and occasionally you will come to a large building called a church house, or church building. Look on the sign and you will learn the name of the group that meets there. In any city with large populations you will find hundreds of these places where people assemble who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you will investigate you will learn that generally speaking each group keeps to itself and will have nothing to do with any other group. You have discovered something about the divided state of Christianity. How did these believers become so divided?

Jesus prayed for those who believe in Him and who wish to be His disciples. We learn several things about the followers of Christ from this prayer. In fact, in this prayer we may learn the answer to our question, "How have so many believers become so divided?" Will you study this prayer with me today? (John 17)

The apostle John is the one who tells us about a long conversation that Jesus had with his apostles the night before he was crucified. It was that night when Jesus gave his apostles instructions about what is called the Lord's Supper. John begins recording this great conversation in chapter 13 in the book we call the Gospel of John. When Jesus and his disciples had assembled in the upper room, Jesus wrapped himself with a towel and knelt before each disciple and washed the man's feet. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, he objected. "Lord, do you wash my feet?"

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."<sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."<sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"<sup>10</sup> .....<sup>12</sup> When [Jesus] had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?"<sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.<sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed

your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:7-17 (ESV).)

Jesus' apostles had been arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest in the kingdom. Off and on, all the way to Jerusalem they had been arguing among themselves who would be the greatest. They assumed that Jesus was going to Jerusalem in order to set up his Kingdom. Which one of them would be second in command? Which would be the secretary of state? Which one would be the treasurer? While on the way to Jerusalem the mother of James and John came to ask Jesus if her sons could sit on each side of Jesus in his throne; one son on the right; the other on the left. When the other 10 disciples heard about this they were angry! "But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:25-28 (ESV),) When Jesus washed his apostles' feet, this is the problem he was attempting to solve. Jesus was their Lord and Teacher, but he wrapped himself with the towel and did a servant's job of washing the feet of his disciples. He told those men that they must do the same for each other. They needed an attitude adjustment; they needed humility.

Neighbors, do you think we have uncovered right here one of the problems of divided Christianity? Jesus did not intend for His church to be ruled like some churches are ruled today. He did not mean for there to be a Pope. He did not mean for there to be Cardinals and Archbishops. He did not even mean for local elders of the church to be lords over His flock. That's right. Has the devil tempted believers to become more than just servants? "<sup>10</sup> ...when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.' " (Luke 17:10 (ESV).)

Pride is a terrible condition that builds fences between people. How has believers in Christ become so divided? Isn't pride a big problem? Neighbors, we must humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God. Let us SERVE one another! Let us all ask, "where is the towel?"

There is another problem that Jesus uncovered in his conversation with his disciples the night before His crucifixion. In his response to Peter while washing Peter's feet, Jesus ended that part of his conversation by saying, <sup>11</sup> "Not all of you are clean." ...For he knew who was to betray him." John 13:11 (ESV). Judas was the betrayer. Judas' heart was not clean. Judas, in his heart, had already decided to turn Jesus over to the High Priest and to the authorities. Judas' heart was ready for Satan's entrance. Don't you think the centuries have witnessed these kinds of men? And many of them started their own churches.

Friends, the apostle Paul said it this way, <sup>17</sup> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, [many] walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with [their] minds set on earthly things." (Phil 3:17-19 (ESV).) Can there be this kind of believer? Can there be a believer who has ulterior motives, rather than a heart of sincerity? Can there be a believer who will betray the Lord Jesus for money, like Judas? When we see the corruption that many leaders of churches have practiced in our own lifetime, how can we not believe that many of these people have divided the church of Jesus Christ? It is no wonder that some people have bad attitudes toward Christianity. In the book of Revelation we read about the church of the Laodiceans, which was a church of Jesus Christ. Jesus told them, <sup>15</sup> "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes,

so that you may see.” (Rev 3:15-18 (ESV).) Do you think there are some churches like that in the world today?

What do the divided believers need to bring them into the oneness of Christ? What can be done to break down the walls that separate believers? Jesus prayed about the solution in John 17. Jesus said to His Father, “<sup>14</sup> I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. (John 17:14-19 (KJV).) Twice Jesus spoke of his followers as being “sanctified through the truth.” The word “sanctified” means to be set apart. And what would set them apart from the world? The truth. God’s word is truth. It divides people into two camps, believers and non-believers. But through the centuries there have been those who were not satisfied with just two groups. Well, you see the number of groups there are today who profess faith in Christ!

Neighbors, if the believers are ever to overcome division it will be because they have been sanctified through God’s truth, God’s Word. But, do you know what I hear? I hear people saying that believers cannot see the Bible alike! I hear people saying there is no such thing as THE truth. That is, everyone has his own version of what is true. These folks do not believe what Jesus said, that the Truth, God’s Word can sanctify the believers. If believers are sanctified through the truth then they will be set apart into one place. Why can’t believers calmly discuss their differences with each other? Because they don’t feel the need. They don’t think it is their duty to bring about the unity of believers in Christ. They don’t think it is possible. With God, all things are possible. With God’s Word sanctifying us then all things are possible. Neighbor, do you believe in the sanctifying truth of God’s word? If so, then why are you afraid to study the Bible with people from another church? Have you already assumed that believers can never be ONE body in Jesus Christ? Are you like some who do not believe that we have all of God’s sanctifying Word? Are you like some who think there is no such thing as THE TRUTH? Why can’t believers discuss their differences? Do you believe that it makes no difference? You did not read that in God’s truth; God’s Word! Do you believe that it just stirs up anger? This kind of anger comes from

pride. Perhaps we better get our towels and begin washing each other's feet as preparation for studying God's truth! Remember that the greatest in the kingdom is the slave of everyone else! Oh, I guess we could all wrap ourselves in towels so that we would all be dressed alike, but the sameness we need is humble hearts! We need to be just alike in our efforts to serve each the other. Don't you think it's time for churches of believers to come out of isolation and humbly seek God's truth that sanctifies? This is the foundation of unity. This foundation is found right here before our eyes in Jesus' prayer. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth." (John 17:17, KJV.)

The humble, the beautiful believers in Christ ought to be together in the church of Jesus Christ, which he purchased with his own blood. Jesus' apostle taught, "there is one body" (Ephesians 4:4). Neighbor, do you believe that? Get rid of the pride. Get rid of the arrogance. Open your heart to the sanctifying Truth of God. May we all do this.

The Churches of Christ plead for a return to New Testament Christianity. We believe it can be achieved by diligent humble attention to the word of God. We of the Gandy church of Christ invite you to freely worship with us today.