



# Efforts to Unite Diversity in an Indonesian Baptist Churches Context: An Ecumenical Perspective based on John 17:20-21

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## Abstract

This article aims to propose a model of togetherness between churches based on Biblical truths. In the historical facts, togetherness efforts between churches often experience some problems. Various unification efforts are often carried out, but the results have not been seen to last. On the other hand, efforts have also emerged to unite the church by eliminating its diversity, but the problem istill remains at the feet of the ecumenical movement. Such conditions, however, endanger the ecumenical movement itself. The results of this study are expected to produce a biblical paradigm and give the direction to the ecumenical movement, so that we can bring diverse churches together to a better condition of unity as Christ's Body. This research applied a qualitative methodology. The researchers evaluated the qualitative data, and gave meaning or interpretation to the facts obtained using biblical literature. This research was carried out byfirst collecting data related to the ecumenical movement, secondly extracting biblical text data, and thirdly looking at the relevance to the present ecumenical movement. This study offers an effort to unite churches in Indonesia, especially in the context of the Indonesian Baptist Churches based on John 17:20-21 within an ecumenical perspective.

**Keywords:** ecumenical, unite, diversity, john, Indonesia baptist church.



## Introduction

Scripture stresses the importance of how unity and love reflect a person's commitment to Jesus Christ (John 13:34–35; 1 John 4:20). Jesus shifts from praying for Himself (John 17:1–5), to praying for the disciples (John 17:6–19), to praying for all Christians (John 17:20), the first thing He refers to is unity (Psalm 133:1). Christian "love" is vital and is intended to distinguish believers from non-believers. God's word is clear that all who love God will obey God (John 14:15), and the main proof will be in a unifying love for other believers (John 17:23).

The prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17 consists of three main points. First Jesus prayed for Himself, remembering that His time of crucifixion was near. Second, He prays for His disciples, so that God's power takes care of them. Third, there is prayer for those who are in distant places, and distant eras, through various generations. This third part penetrates into the future church, as the laos or nation of God, His Holy Body (Nicolaidis, 2010)

John 17: 20-21, and more broadly until 20-23 are grouped into the second part of the Lord Jesus' prayer. In a broader context, this can be seen until verse 26. This section talks about the Lord Jesus' prayer to the disciples in the future. The unity of the Father and Son becomes a model of unity that can be experienced by those who live in Him. God acknowledges that God is "one" in a triune Godhead (Nicolaidis, 2010; 2018) and understands it as an expression of their solidarity within nations. This section emphasizes the same idea, but in a way that is more related to the idea of God's personal habitation introduced in chapter 14 (specifically 14: 23-24). As an example relating to the glory of the people for those who glorify God will be glorified (cf. Isa.46: 13), God also washed the place where He was present with the glory of His presence (Exodus29: 43) (Exell, 1978).

The unity of the Indonesian Baptist Churches in the DKI Jaya *region*, on the other hand, still needs to be pursued.<sup>1</sup> This unity can be seen in many ways; first with regard to church doctrine. Baptist churches in the Jakarta region still do not have the same doctrinal view.<sup>2</sup> There is a difference in teaching from one church to another. The second need to be seen is related to the common fellowship between churches.<sup>3</sup> A joint fellowship between churches in one region is held once a month. The fellowship was held in an effort to strengthen the unity between churches, but what happened was that not every church actively participated in the fellowship, so the fellowship was only attended by a few churches, and not all churches participated in the fellowship.<sup>4</sup> Participation in inter-church fellowship is still low.<sup>5</sup> The churches have not maximally participated in various activities held together in an effort to increase unity.<sup>6</sup> Third, with regard to

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<sup>3</sup> Interview Pastor Irwanto Sudibyo, M.Th. Assistant of Pastor at Gereja Baptis Indonesia (Indonesia Baptist Church) TFC Jakarta on May 7, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Interview I Made Wasta, M.Th., Pastor at Gereja Baptis Indonesia (Indonesia Baptist Church) Muara Karang-Principal BPD DKI Jaya and Banten on May 6, 2022.

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the implementation of the central church program, regional churches are still not aligned with the central policy.<sup>7</sup> Each church emphasizes the local church program more than the program that has been jointly created through the central church. Each is tempted to highlight themselves, or wants to make themselves better than the other.<sup>8</sup> So it is more locally based. This means that one church seeks to make itself better than another church. Togetherness is often seen as just an activity. The emphasis on unity was also discussed by the readers, but the opposition was disturbed by this. They are priests who live in the Synagogue. They put more emphasis on ethnic and cultural unity. Perhaps they were Galandites and their constituents in Asia (note John's introduction, also note in John 10:16; 11:52; 12: 20-23). John clearly emphasizes ethnic reconciliation in Christ, in particular note chapter 4 (the Samaritans). However, churches and followers of Christ constitute a small minority in a hostile world and need the support of others as well as other minorities (cf. Psalms78: 3-7) (Exell, 1978).

Ecumenism can pull Christians together, uniting their life and missions into one and bringing the Body of Christ and the human community closer to the fulfillment of God's real purposes. While some Churches have a positive attitude to the ecumenical task and are keen to work with others, some are not. Some churches often behave with self-centeredness, ego, and pride and may not be spiritually or emotional mature and are thus inflexible to change and sharing. Churches cannot compromise the truth and have superficial relationships. We all need to hold fast to the Head, Jesus Christ and continue faithfully in His word, and we may then make progress toward the goal of the unity of the faith. The essence of this prayer in John is the unity of churches and believers. From this text, two main points can be seen. Both of these points indicate the nature of unity among churches. Both also explain to whom and what prayer points to pray for. By understanding this, every church can understand how important unity is among the churches. The unity of churches is not just a theological concept, but it must be evident in the behavior of daily life. Thus, this article aims to find the theological meaning of John 17:21-22 through the study of hermeneutics and provides implications for church unity in the context of the Indonesian Baptist Church.

## Research Methods

This article uses qualitative methods. This is a method that analyzes and interprets texts and finds the meaning of a phenomenon (Lambert & Lambert, 2021: 255–256; Taylor et al., 2016).

The qualitative method is an inquiry strategy that emphasizes the search for meaning, understanding, concepts, characteristics, symbols, and descriptions of a phenomenon, which is holistic and natural (Bogdan, 2007; Tracy, 2013). This method is used to explore and understand the meaning that comes from social or humanitarian problems (Creswell, 2013: 4). About the Bible data, this qualitative method will use the exegetical approach. This is used to get in-depth data, data that contains important meaning.

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<sup>7</sup> Interview I Made Wasta, M.Th., Pastor at Gereja Baptis Indonesia (Indonesia Baptist Church) Muara Karang-Principal BPD DKI Jaya and Banten on May 6, 2022.

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## **Designation of Prayer (John 17:20)**

This section explains for whom the Lord Jesus prayed, "And not only for them I ask (pray), but also for those who believe in Me through their words." Jesus prayed both for the disciples and for all believers. All is related to the unity of God's people. Following verse 18, the disciples are sent to serve the world and bear fruit. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Prayer also includes everyone who believes in the preaching of the disciples (Casteigt, 2020; Wong, 2006). In order that it can be understood for whom this prayer is intended a brief explanation follows below.

First, for disciples. This is a continuation of the previous section, which explains for whom the Lord Jesus prayed. The phrase, "And not only for them I ask (pray)," in essence explains that at the beginning the Lord Jesus had prayed for the disciples. He prayed that God's power would look after his disciples. In this section, it is repeated with a negative sentence. This confirms that the Lord Jesus, besides praying for the disciples, also prayed for churches and believers. This can also be an increase in ideas, from praying for disciples, now praying for everyone who is won through the testimonies of for example, students. If you pay close attention until now, this is also the Lord Jesus' prayer for all churches and believers (Harley, 2014).

Second, for believers. The Lord Jesus prayed for the disciples and also for those who were won over by the testimony of the disciples. The final part of the Lord Jesus' prayer (vv.20-26) is for believers who will come through the message of the apostles. In church times, all believers come to Christ directly or indirectly through the witness of the apostles. Jesus understood His mission would succeed. He will die and rise, He will send the Holy Spirit, the apostles will preach, people will be united, and the church will be formed. Just as Hebrew priests were born for each tribal name before God's presence in the Tabernacle and the Temple (Exodus 28: 9-12; 21-29), so also with Jesus, the High Priest, brought believers into the room most holy before the Father in heaven (Hebrews 4: 14-5: 12; 7: 24-8: 2) (Fykse Tveit, 2003).

From the Lord Jesus' prayer, this can be seen; First, there is clear certainty. At that time His followers were still few, even though He was facing the cross but His faith did not waver, He prayed for those who would come and believe in His name. Second, it can be seen His confidence in His disciples. He knew that they did not fully understand Him. He also understood that shortly, he would leave them, which was when He needed His disciples. However, it was to these same people that He looked with conviction, that they would one day spread His name throughout the world through evangelisation. Jesus never lost His trust in God and His confidence in His disciples (Barclay, 2015, 340–341). The Lord Jesus not only prayed for the apostles, but for all those who would be united under the Gospel sermon. They all need the same gift and are tested together through trials. This is an unspeakable joy for every believer because they are the subject of the Lord Jesus' prayer. Not looking at the social background, politics, education, etc., all of them are guaranteed the fulfillment of their prayers. Because the Lord Jesus is a God who sees the existence of His people and will answer every prayer that is offered to Him, according to His will.

## **Point of Prayer (John 17:21)**

The first part states the designation of prayer. Prayer is intended for all believers. The content of the principal of God's prayer is, "that they will all be one, even as You, Father, in Me and I in You, so that they are also in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." Some components in the subject of this prayer include:



### ***So that They all become One***

This verse speaks of unity. The church is often divided into many scandals so that this prayer becomes so meaningful to the unity of the church. The sentence, "All become one," might be interpreted as one in you. All Christians are redeemed with the same blood, and share the promise of eternity. They have the same desire, the same enemy, and the same joy. Even if they are divided into different denominations, eventually they will be united in the same house, the same family, they all have the same God. No pure and holy friendship that was not produced by the Lord Jesus. Therefore the people in the New Testament represent an integral and inseparable whole. Being members of the same body, members of the same family (Acts.4: 32-35; 1 Corinthians12: 4-31; Ephesians 2: 20-22). In this unity they show mutual love for one another, bear one another's burdens, learn things that make peace, and things that hurt one another (Ephesians 4: 3; Romans12: 5-16) (Kysar & Brodie, 1995; Watson, 1999).

All believers are one in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians12: 13), and their unity of spirituality is to manifest their way of life. The union that Christ longs for is of the same kind as the union between the Son and the Father, "as You are in Me and I in You (cf. John 10: 38; 17: 11,23)" (Dorneles, 2021; Nicolaidis, 2018; Elowsky, 2007; Hamblin, 2020) The Father has done His work through the Son, and the Son always obeys the Father's will (John 5:30; 8:29). Spiritual unity will be the pattern of the unity of the church, without unity with the Son and Father, Christianity cannot do something (15:5). The purpose of their lives is to do the will of the Father. He prayed for unity in love, and obedience in His Word, and committed to uniting in His will. There is a difference between uniformity, union, and unity (Carson, 1980; Skinner, 1910).

Unity in faith is vital, and in knowledge or knowledge of Christ. Real faith in daily life experiences is desired. People are united in the Spirit. They also received the same gift. They are however not the same in the light, and spiritual size or maturity. They are united in the most important thing which is the gospel, salvation only through Jesus Christ, they are also united in the true, biblical doctrine. Especially about the Person of Christ, the Holy Spirit and, the Triune Godhead. In particular, they walked together in fellowship, carrying out joint worship. More than that will be manifested in latter days. All godly people will be together. It is like unity in harmony, to love one another. All are bound in perfection, as proof of the new birth, this is the essence of Christians. This is the beauty of the church, which brings security from the enemy. Without this, worship and service, in general, will never be seen. More than that, the petition refers more to the fellowship of saints at the end of time. A body united with faith and love, as one general member and the first church to be born and where Christ is the Head, Savior, and Shepherd (Casteigt, 2020; Hamblin, 2020; Malan, 2011; Nicolaidis, 2010).

This unity specifically includes three things: 1. They will be included in one body. John 11:52; Ephesians 1:10-12. They will all be animated in one Spirit. Union with the Father and Son is obtained only by the Holy Spirit. They have been united with God in one Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17). They will all be branded with the same pictures and writings, and be influenced by the same power. 3. They will all unite in the bond of love and love, all one heart, "that they are all one" (Casteigt, 2020; Watson, 1999)

Practically this unit includes judgment and sensitivity; not in every little thing, but in the great things in God, and in them the value and virtue of prayer lies, they all agree, the favor of God is more than life. God's grace is far better than life. Christ is the best friend and promises there is another life after this one. All who have been sanctified have the same divine nature and image of Jesus+. They all have a new heart, and all become one heart. They are all one in design and





purpose. Every Christian, as he is, sees that God's glory will be the highest goal in his life. They are all one in longing and prayer. Even though they differ in words and expressions, after receiving the same rapture spirit - adoption, and having the same rules and values, they pray for the same things to apply. All one in love and affection. Every Christian tend to himself to love all Christians as much as possible with true and sincere love. This is the Lord Jesus' prayer that the fellowship of the saints we have to believe, the fellowship of all believers in the Lord. and intimate union with all the saints in heaven and on earth 1 John 1: 3. But this prayer of the Lord Jesus will not be answered until all the saints come to heaven, until all are perfect to become one (see John.17: 23; Ephesians 4: 13) (Attridge, 2013; Fykse Tveit, 2003; Hendriksen, 2002).

### ***Just Like the Father and He is One***

The same thing has been said in John.17: 11, that they become one as "We," and is repeated in John.17: 22. This is the longing of Jesus' heart. The same thought is prayed in John.17: 11 specifically for the disciples as servants and apostles, that they become one in witness to Christ, that they are in harmony - in evangelism, according to the first evangelists of the Gospel. Not only one in the heart, but also one in the mouth, states the same things. Unity in the service of the gospel is both beauty and strength in the gospel. But it is also certain that in one prayer (John.17: 21) it is for all believers. This is the Lord Jesus' prayer for all this, and we believe that this prayer will be answered; that they will become one, one in us (John.17: 21) (Hera, 2018; Morris, 1995). Jesus prayed that they would all be united as the Father and He are one. This is not an administrative or organizational unit, and is not at all meant an ecclesiastical unit. This unity is a unity in personal relationships.

The union between Jesus and the Father is a union of love and obedience. It is this unity in love that is prayed by the Lord Jesus, a unity in which Christians love one another because they love Him, a unity that is entirely based on a relationship from heart to heart. But it must be understood that the unity of Christians is like that between the Father and the Son, but only at certain points can it be compared. This is not the unity of nature as can be referenced, but the unity of plans, advice, goals in finding the same object, and the manifestation and attachment of the same thing, and the desire to promote the same thing (Casteigt, 2020; Dorneles, 2021). The Father is the perpetual cause of the Godhead, from whom the Son is begotten everlastingly and also from whom the Holy Spirit or Paraclete proceeds forever (Nicolaides, 2018).

There are similarities in the existence of the Father and the Son, one in nature and essence, in power and will, and the sense of love. This union transcends all forms of oneness among humans, or which can be understood by humans. But this is an example of unity among the saints with one another. This must be understood not about equality but a likeness (Gill, 2012; Maritz, 2007). This is not a unity of nature, but a personal relationship from the heart to heart, unity of love, and obedience. It is also a unity of plan, advice, purpose in finding the same object, and manifestations and attachments of the same thing, as well as a desire to promote the same thing and emphasize equality.

### ***So that They are also in Us***

That they will also be one in "We." Become one in God and Christ. This is a common phrase in the New Testament. This phrase is used to record a unity between believers as the basis and result of an equal union of God and Savior. They are all loved by God with eternal love. They become inseparable. All are chosen in Christ, as members of the body of Christ, they have been united with Him. He is the Mediator of the people before the Father, their successor and brings



them to the Father. There is a manifestation of unity in repentance when someone is open before Christ and personally accepts Him as Lord and Savior. As the fruit of eternal love, and with all forms of goodness and glory, all the elect are brought into the presence of God, and God will be everything and in everything, and that is the subject of Christ's prayer in this section (Gill, 2012; Hamblin, 2020).

### ***For the Word to Believe that You Sent Me***

Christians will never organize their Church in the same way. They will never worship God in the same way. Christian unity overcomes all these differences and unites them all in *agape* love. Christian unity has now been reduced because Christians have prioritized their church organizations first and foremost. If believers love one another and truly love Christ, then there will be no church that ostracizes a person who is a disciple of Christ. The only love that is planted by God in human hearts can break down the barriers that they have set up between themselves and between their churches (Black, 1988; Smith & Barrett, 1980). Christ saw and prayed that this kind of unity would convince the world of the truths of Christianity and the truth about the position of Christ. It is more by human nature to walk alone rather than together. True unity among all believers will be a supernatural fact, which also requires supernatural information. It is tragic because such unity has never been seen in the life of fellow believers. This is why the world cannot see the highest value of the Christian faith. All believers must seek to actualize this oneness with others, and this is the answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ (Barclay, 2015, 342–343). The world has been overcome by darkness, and is full of hostility and war, but they will see the light. That light shines in Christianity which will overcome the source of contradiction. The result of this is love that comes from heaven. John 13:34 confirms that all people or the world can see the lives of Christians who live in love for one another.

The purpose of the Lord Jesus' prayer is their oneness, and the purpose of their oneness is for more believers to exist. The unity they must exemplify is the union between the Father and Christ. That unity was revealed in chapters 1: 1-2 and 1:18 (Casteigt, 2020; Watson, 1999). This theme of unity was developed in the main metaphors and branches in chapter 15. This is very closely related to the fruit that is told in the figure and the results of the unity witness that has been mentioned. The thing that needs to be understood is that unity does not sacrifice truth. Conversely, more people believe in Christ who is the truth because of that unity. They will believe through the proclamation of the truth, according to verse 1. Lest a church compromises the truth in the interests of institutional unity. That unity has been reached in the body of Christ. Ephesians 2: 11-22, states that Jews and Gentiles have been united in Christ, and this need not be separated from all the rules and customs. Galatians 3:28 states that there are no more Jews or Greeks, no more slaves or free men, no men or women, because all have been united in Christ. The Lord Jesus also developed the theme of witness and faith which is the purpose of that unity, "they must believe that You sent me." This theme summarizes the whole identity and mission of Christ. Christ was truly sent by the Father, and only did what the Father wanted, and represented and revealed God the Father (Black, 1988: 158; Hagelberg, 2004: 180–181; Minear, 2004).

### **Ecumenical: An effort to unite diversity**

In fact, the church is often divided by disharmony. Each church believes it has positioned itself better than the others. This raises new problems related to church unity. The church no longer thinks about togetherness between churches, but focuses more on their respective churches



needs and wants. This condition encourages the need for a common perception that leads to church unity. Church unity is not meant as an effort to eliminate the identity of each church but rather as an effort to unite among various different denominations. The identity of each church is to be maintained, even though they are united in togetherness. This unity is not only at the doctrinal level, but more than that, it is also related to ecclesiastical activities. This is also not just an equation of theological concepts, but also includes behavior of daily life. This is the unity of believers, and every believer can understand how important unity is among God's people (Malan, 2011).

In this union, Christians will show love to one another, bear burdens, seek peace, and avoid quarrels amongst themselves. All believers are one in the body of Christ who manifests their way of life. Even if they are divided into different denominations, in the end, they will be united in the same house and family. They all have the same God. This is the union that Christ longs for which is likened to the union of the Son and the Father, "as You are in Me and I in You" (Aquinas, 2017; Casteigt, 2020; Vereş, 2008). It is the union in faith, knowledge on knowledge of Christ. Faith lives in daily experience. Every believer is united in the Spirit (Phang & Putrawan, 2020). From this in the end every believer can understand how important the unity between churches is.

The term Ecumenical can be understood as the entire corpus of Christian churches; efforts to reunite Christian churches that have been separated (End, 2013: 375). The large Indonesian dictionary defines the Ecumenical as an attempt to approach and collaborate among various Christian churches (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). The word "ecumenical" in principle implies the unity and unity of churches (believers), including the ideal that organizationally different churches can be united (Banawiratma, 1994: 18; Butselaar, 2010).

In the modern sense, this word no longer refers to a reality, but to a goal that is to be achieved through an effort and struggle, namely the one church (*esa*), holy and apostolic of the credo (confession of faith), which is believed by the cause must therefore be manifested. In the concept of the report on the oneness of Christianity and the relationship of the churches with the oneness mentioned, six important things for the one church arise, namely: (1) Understanding the common faith, (2) Baptism, (3) Holy Communion, (4) Publicly accepted positions, (5) Freedom of interpretation of sacramental grace and position and official authority, and (6) A reasonable place for the gift of prophecy. It is based on the oneness that appears perfectly impossible to achieve immediately, but can only be realized through a longer process. The goal of the ecumenical movement is to bring about the unity of the churches (DeJonge, 2014: 135–136; Dorneles, 2021; Modise, 2018; Wiarda, 2017).

The ecumenical church is reinterpreting and church movement that wants to bring the whole Christian to a new conviction about its unity (Bargár, 2018; Tamawiwiy, 2021) in Jesus Christ and from that conviction to the effort to realize that unity in the new world is needed. Ecumenical work takes place in the form of negotiations between commissions from various denominations as well as through discussions of several inter-denominational organizations such as the World Council of Churches.

Relevant topics include Baptism, the Eucharist (Holy Communion), and Christian Ministry. The Lord Jesus Prayer in John 17: 20-21 can be a reflection of the ecumenical movement. The ecumenical movement is not understood as a union that removes diversity between churches but should rather be understood as the unity of the church as each is a member of the body of Christ.





## Conclusion

Through the discussion above, there is the emergence of a problem of unity among the Indonesian Baptist Churches because they are more concerned with the needs of the local church and lack of concern for the church and other members of the Indonesian Baptist Church congregation. How to build unity among believers? The Churches' unity is the core prayer of the Lord Jesus. Churches' unity is a union of love, faith and hope. This is not like God's nature, but rather obedience in carrying out His Divine will. When believers unite in carrying out God's will, the world will understand Christian values through every believer. Thus, many people will know Jesus who is the Messiah, the Savior through the witness of the life of believers. This unity does not negate diversity among various denominations of churches.

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