

JESUS' PRAYER ON BEHALF OF HIS FOLLOWERS

17:6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word."

Until now, the disciples had depended heavily on Jesus' presence. Though He promised He would send the Holy Spirit, He also gives them into God's care by prayer.

Before making specific requests for His followers, Jesus reviews His work and describes His followers. This is the way that Jesus thinks of His own as He prays for them:

First, Jesus describes His followers as the ones to whom He has manifested the Father's name. The "name" of God is not merely his label, but a reference to his character. It represents the person; it "enshrines who God is in His character, His essential nature" (Kostenberger, 490-491). When the character or nature of God is made known, it is virtually synonymous to revealing the Father's glory (see my notes on Jn. 17:4-5). Thus, the first characteristic of a follower of Christ is that he grasps the revelation of the Father in the Son; he sees the glory of God in Christ. The world as a whole had failed to see this (Jn. 12:37).

Secondly, Jesus thinks of His followers as the Father's possession (also 17:9). He says, "They were Yours and You gave them to Me." He sees believers as belonging to the Father before they were born. Long before Jesus' mission, His followers were God's possession (see Eph. 1:4). This point is made repeatedly throughout the gospel (Jn. 17:2; 6:37, 44, 65), and is one of the reasons that we are not our own; it is one of the things that distinguishes children of God from the rest of the world. The common attitude of the people of the world is that they view their life as their own, their time as their own, their future as their own, and their goals as their own. But the Christian is God's own; he has been sovereignly chosen by God and redeemed by Him. They are His. But Christians are not just God's possession, they are God's gift to Christ (17:2, 6, 9, 24). Christians often think of Jesus as God's gift to them (Jn. 3:16); they rarely see themselves as God's gift to Jesus. The Father's children are given to the Son as a love gift. This is how the Lord Jesus gains His bride.

Then the Son gives a multitude of gifts to those who have been given to Him (He has given them eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent, 17:2, 3; a revelation of the Father, 17:6; the words of the Father, 17:8).

Thirdly, a follower is characterized as one who keeps God's word. In John 5:24, hearing Jesus' word is the same as believing in the Father who sent Him. In John 14:23 it is the evidence that one loves Jesus. Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (cf. Jn. 15:7). I John 2:3-5 says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected."

Obedience to God is necessary to receive revelation about God. Jesus said, "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." In John 17:8 (below), the disciples understood that Jesus had come from the Father for they had received Jesus' words. Modern ideas of salvation often tend to polarize obedience and grace. People claim that if we are saved by grace, obedience plays no part in our salvation and to claim that obedience is essential is to abandon grace. But the Bible does not make such distinctions. It is clear that a believer is saved by grace; it is equally clear that a believer who is saved by grace obeys.

Although Jesus has emphasized God's election of the believing (thus stressing God's sovereign control in salvation), believers are never pictured as puppets. "They believe, they hear, they obey; and the belief is their belief, the hearing is their hearing, the obeying is their obeying. It is not easy to see how God's unconditional sovereignty, even in salvation, and man's free agency as a creature in God's universe, can co-exist; but co-exist they do, according to the Scriptures. In expressing these truths, it is essential to avoid formulations in which God's activity and man's activity become mutually self-limiting. The Scriptures avoid such traps" (Carson, Farewell Discourse, 185).

17:7 "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; 17:8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me."

Verse 7 expresses Jesus' dependence upon the Father (see. 5:19-30); everything Jesus gave was first given to Him. Jesus had fulfilled the Father's mission without error; He had said all that the Father had wanted Him to say (17:7). Now, at last, the disciples had come to understand what Jesus was saying and recognized that Jesus was on a divine mission (17:8b: "they believed you sent Me").

Though the disciples still did not understand that Jesus would die and rise again, they believed that He was sent by God. What they were capable of believing, they believed. This is another mark of one of Jesus' followers.

17:9 "I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; 17:10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them."

Verse 9 begins Jesus' actual petitions for His disciples. His first concern is their protection while they are still in the world.

The fact that Jesus' prayer is not for the world does not mean that He does not love the world. It has been already explicitly stated that He loves it (Jn. 3:16). Furthermore, His mission has been to the world. He prays for the disciples because He has a deep affection for the disciples, and it is through their testimony to the world that others will be saved. He does not pray for the world because the world is in opposition to God; it refuses to believe in the One whom God sent, and has no relationship to Him.

Again, notice that the privileges the disciples have are based on God's action, not their own; they are once again described as those whom the Father gave to Christ, not as the ones who came to Christ by their own choosing .

The Gospel of John frequently refers to the fellowship that exists between the Father and the Son. What belongs to One belongs to the Other. All things that are "Yours are Mine" (17:10) goes beyond the expression "all things that are Mine are Yours." The latter could be said by any creature; the former can never be said with reference to God.

Jesus returns to the theme of glory (17:10), but this time He says He has been glorified in the disciples. God is glorified in the work of the Son. God is also said to be glorified in the work of believers who abide in the Son (13:31). Likewise, Jesus is glorified by believers (17:10), and when He is glorified the Father is glorified (17:1).

"I have been glorified in them" could very well be looking forward to the glory they will bring Him, just as in 17:2,4(Morris, 726, n. 34). In other words, Jesus looked at the disciples with hope, and though they were weak and ignorant now, He realized that with the Father's enablement and the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit they would fulfill the mission they were entrusted with, and glorify their Master. So with confidence He says, "I have been glorified in them."

17:11 "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are."

Jesus' departure is so near that He uses the present tense to describe it; His work is done and so He speaks as if He is no longer in the world.

Jesus prays that the Father would keep the disciples. It is probably safe to assume that this means that they are kept from evil so they will continue to be one as He and the Father are one. In other words, He is praying that they are kept from disunity caused by sin. But a wider meaning is also possible, for He prays that they are kept in the Father's name (that they are kept in the revealed character of God).

To be one as Jesus is one with the Father is only an analogy and is not true in all aspects of their oneness. Jesus and the Father are one in essence and nature; we are not one with Christ in that sense. But Jesus' oneness with the Father is also described as a functional oneness. That is, they also enjoyed perfect oneness in purpose, unity in love, and a commonality in holiness and truth. These latter themes have already been stressed in a believer's relationship to Christ (Jn. 13:34; 15:13), and are the type of unity Jesus is referring to.

The topic of unity will be picked up again in 17:21-23. It should be noted that if this is Jesus' prayer for both His disciples and future believers, it follows that it is important and that some of the greatest

threats the church will face will be focused on destroying this unity. If Jesus prayed this, how much more should we deem it necessary to be praying for unity too!

17:12 "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled."

Verse 12 looks back at Jesus' ministry and the stewardship entrusted to Him. Jesus kept the disciples *in* the Father's name; that is, He kept them in adherence to what the Father revealed (Beasley-Murray, 299), so that none perished but Judas, the son of perdition (son of perdition points to his character rather than his destiny – he was characterized by lostness – Morris, 728). Judas' falling away was not a failure, but the plan of God; he defected so the Scripture would be fulfilled (once again emphasizing God's purpose and control). "This does not mean that Judas was an automation. He was a responsible person and acted freely. But God used his evil act to bring about His purpose. There is a combination of the human and the divine, but in this passage it is the divine side rather than the human that receives stress. God's will in the end was done by handing over Christ to be crucified" (Morris, 728; Ps. 41:9).

17:13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves."

Although Jesus was soon leaving the world (see above on 17:11), currently He is in the world and is thus praying for the disciples from that perspective: "these things I speak in the world."

His prayer is that they may have His joy in them, and He prays in such a way that He intends for them to hear His prayer. He is speaking as He is, SO THAT they may have fullness of joy. In other words, the disciples' joy is related to their knowledge that Jesus is praying for them and they know what it is that He is asking on their behalf. This is not the only time Jesus encourages the disciples in this way. In Luke 22:31-32 Jesus told Peter that Satan has demanded permission to sift him like wheat, but He says, "I have prayed for you." Furthermore, He even tells Peter what He prayed. He said, "I prayed that your faith may not fail." Likewise, in John 11:41-42 Jesus prays aloud for the benefit of those listening. He says, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me."

It is important to see that Jesus prayed out loud not just because He is concerned with our security; if He was simply concerned with our security it would have been enough that He prayed for us. But He is also concerned for our serenity, and because of that He tells them that he is praying for them. These should also be concerns of believers. We should not only pray for one another's security, we should also be concerned over the tranquility of others, which should cause us to say more frequently, "I am praying for you."

In John 15:11 Jesus made a similar statement: "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." And in John 16:33 He had asked for peace: "These things I

have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." The death of Christ results in joy that could not be experienced prior to that event.

17:14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17:15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one."

Jesus' gift to the disciples is in giving them God's word; their belief in it aligned them with Christ and disconnected them from the world. In John 15:19 Jesus said to the disciples, "I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."

Even though they are not part of the world, Jesus is not asking that they be taken from the world (17:15), rather, He asks that they be kept from the influences of the evil one (I Jn. 5:19; Jn. 12:13; 14:30; 16:11; I Jn. 2:13f.; 3:12).

17:16 "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

The church has a task to perform in the world, but it is not to be a part of its evil practices. Thus, Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth." To sanctify means to make separate, or holy. The church is to be distinct. It is not to look like, sound like, or think like the world it is in. The disciples' sanctification is effected by the revelation they had received; the word of the Father brought forth by Christ is what sets men apart.

17:18 "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

17:19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

Jesus' obedience to the Father's will (17:18) is the model that the disciples are to follow (20:21). Jesus sent His disciples into the world as He was sent by the Father into the world. Jesus sanctified Himself by doing the Father's will and so He prays that they are sanctified in the truth.