

# The Gospel of John

Leon L. Combs, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D.

## Chapter Seventeen

### The High Priestly Prayer

This is the magnificent prayer of Jesus recorded by John. It is not the same as the prayer of Jesus recorded in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:36-45; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-46). There is at least one very good book written just on this chapter that I highly recommend: Marcus Rainsford, "Our Lord Prays for His Own", Kregel Publications, 1986. That book is 476 pages long so my notes are certainly very brief in comparison! The prayer can be divided into three parts: Jesus' prayer about Himself (1-5), His prayer for the disciples (6-19), and His prayer for those who will believe based upon those who believe based upon the writings of His disciples (20-26). This last part is especially meaningful as it means that almost 2000 years ago Jesus was praying for believers of today. Of course those who are Christians today were actually chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

#### John 17:1-5

*Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, (2) even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. (3) "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (4) "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (5) "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

Note carefully that John even recorded the gesture of Jesus as he wanted this portion of his book to be especially accurate and revealing of the actions of our Lord. This was a typical Jewish gesture of prayer but it is very meaningful since only the Son could actually gaze upon the Father in heaven. John has recorded that Jesus was always aware of the calendar He kept in accord with the wishes of the Father. He informed His mother that the time had not come for Him to manifest His power (2:4). His brothers urged Him to publically declare Himself but He refused because His time had not yet come (7:8). Twice John recorded that He escaped from His accusers because His time had not yet come (7:30; 8:20). Now He acknowledged that His time had come (12:23; 13:1; 17:1). First Jesus states the authority given Him to give eternal life to all those given to Him by the Father. There are many expressions in this chapter regarding eternal life that is available to those given Him by the Father for their glorification (1:4; 3:15-16; 4:14; 5:21, 26; 6:33, 54; 10:10; 11:25; 14:6). The central purpose of Jesus was the glorification of the Father through giving eternal life to those chosen for this purpose.

Secondly Jesus defines the nature of this eternal life as stated in verse 3. We see that this definition is not some recipe of works by those chosen but by a relationship between the person, the Son, and the Father. To have a completion of existence for those chosen by God they must

have an eternal relationship with God and so must know Him in every meaning of that word “know”. The only way to the Father is through Jesus (14:6). This exclusive nature of Christianity is abhorrence to the world but is the ultimate truth of reality. There are wonderful dwelling places waiting for every believer of Jesus Christ (14:2) but an eternity of God’s wrath awaiting all others.

The final act of the work of Jesus has yet to be completed in time but, from an eternal perspective Jesus knew it to be complete. He had the authority to refuse to complete this final task but He had always been dedicated to doing the will of the Father to the conclusion (John 12:27-28). He only had one petition to the Father and that was for Him to bring Him back to the glory He had relinquished at the incarnation. Now He asks the Father to glorify both of them by returning Him to the place He had occupied before the creation of the world (17:5).

### **John 17:6-8**

*"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. (7) "Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; (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.*

The disciples had been given to Jesus from the Father and Jesus had faithfully revealed the name of the Father to them. The Father chose all of His people from before the beginning of time:

*Eph 1:3-6 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”*

Then, through Jesus, He predestined all of them for adoption as sons. He specifically gave the disciples to Jesus during His incarnation for they would be the witnesses to the world of the grace of God. Jesus knew that after Pentecost they would all understand what Jesus had been teaching them during their three years with Him. The Father had given Jesus the words needed for the evangelization of the world and He had given them to His disciples. They then did understand that Jesus came from the Father and that He had sent Jesus to them. This “passing of the baton” has been going on for about 2000 years as all who had been chosen by the Father were given to Jesus and adopted as sons.

### **John 17:9-11**

*"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; (10) and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. (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 then specifically prays for these disciples and not for all people in the world. Jesus prays for these eleven people because they had been chosen by the Father and given to Him. The

oneness of the Father and the Son was so intense that whatever each had so did the other (John 10:30). Jesus had been glorified in them for they would tell the world about Him. Although He did have some time left on earth, His devotion to His task was so complete that His death, resurrection, and ascension were completed already. Whatever is ordained by God will certainly occur in the proper time. He knew that they would remain in the world until their death and that they would face considerable persecution. Because of what lay ahead of them, Jesus asks the Holy Father to keep them, or preserve them. The word translated “keep” above is often translated “preserve” and it specifically means to defend from any enemy. Christians persevere because they are preserved by the Father. The title “Holy Father” is unusual and is comparable to “Righteous Father” that appears in verse 25. Only God is righteous so the title is appropriate and only may be used of the Father. Using the name is identical with the authority of the person and God, of course, is totally able to keep His own forever. The unity between the disciples is to be the same as that which exists between the Trinity and is not totally perceivable by those who remain in the world. This is an existence that we can only long for, knowing that one day it will be a reality that lasts forever.

### **John 17:12-16**

*"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. (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. (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. (15) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (16) "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

Jesus is already speaking in the past tense because He is totally dedicated to carrying out the plan in its entirety. He loves His disciples and is concerned that they will continue to stay in the world with its hostility and temptations. He has kept them so that none of them perished except for Judas. John does not identify the scripture to which Jesus referred but it was probably either Psalm 69:25 or Psalm 109:6-8. Jesus then not only prayed to the Father for their protection but also that they may have His joy made full in themselves. There would be nothing in the world to contribute to this joy but they could have an attitude of completing their service to the Father as did Jesus so that they could have His joy. The world asks for conformity to its value system but those who belong to God must cancel that conformity and be transformed by a renewing of their minds according to the character of God: *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”* (Rom 12:2) There are two worldviews prevalent in the world and those who do not conform to the world’s worldview will be hated because by their refusal of conformation they are condemning the world. Nobody likes to be judged by some source outside of themselves and all who are not disciples of Jesus Christ will be seen as judgmental against others.

It is important to note that Jesus did not ask the Father to take His disciples out of the world and similarly Christians should not seek to isolate themselves from the world. They are to continue the task set by Jesus to fulfill the Father’s plan and so they are to be in complete subjection to the will of the Father. Jesus does ask the Father to keep them from the evil one. Christians and non-

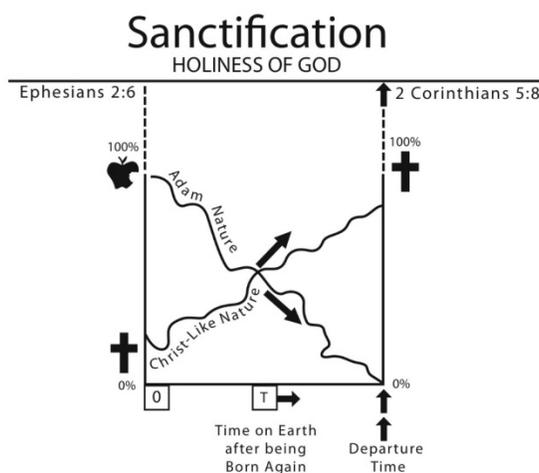
Christians should be like oil and water in that they do not form a solution but remain separate from each other. This oneness with the Trinity forms an inherent separation from the world. Those pretending to be His disciples will not remain when times become trying: *“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”* (1 John 2:19) Jesus never compromised His principles and remained devoted to the teachings of the Father and so should all of His disciples. The Father then will keep the disciples of Jesus from the evil:

- Psa 121:7 NASB The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul.
- 2Thes 3:3 NASB But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- 1Peter 1:5 NASB who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

### John 17:17-19

*“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (18) “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. (19) “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

Sanctify means to separate or set apart for some particular function. The disciples of Jesus Christ are set apart from the world by the truth of God, which is His word. As Christians are being progressively sanctified they become more separated from the world’s value system and more consecrated to the service of God. They do not become physically separated from the world but their core beliefs are so different from those of the world that they cannot participate in worldly affairs. Today we see that the world is pushing homosexuality in every venue. Churches are ordaining homosexual ministers and marrying homosexual couples in a Christian service. The Boy Scouts have admitted gay scouts but not gay leaders yet. However it will not be long before they have to accept gay leaders also for it is inconsistent to accept one level of membership but not another. Such actions by the world are showing more and more how different real Christians are from the world. It will not be long before the average church in America is no different from the world. Our sanctification continues as illustrated:



In verse 18, the Greek word translated “sent” implies the use of equipment for a definite mission. The “equipment” given to Jesus for His mission was the words of the Father and His works that

Jesus used to show the character of God in a sinful world. Similarly Christians today have the same witness that has been brought forward by many generations of faithful disciples so that we are also equipped to carry on the mission of Jesus. In verse 19 Jesus is stating that He will complete His sanctification by making Himself totally separate from the world in a physical sense. His standard for them will be His willing sacrifice of Himself on the Cross and that will be their example. Their standard will be as stated by Paul: *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* (Gal 2:20)

### **John 17:20-21**

*“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21) that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

This is one of my favorite set of verses for Jesus prayed for me about 2000 years ago because I believed in Him through the writings of His disciples as led by the Holy Spirit. He prayed that Christians of all ages would be one in the same manner that He and the Father are One. The reason must always be remembered: that the world may believe that the Father sent the Son. Jesus was looking into the future when there would be many more disciples of different backgrounds, race, and developing customs. His prayer was that all would be one in the same way that the Trinity was one. This unity is not based on all disciples remaining in the vine as John discussed in chapter 15. Paul similarly expressed this unity of body:

1Cor12:12-14 *“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (14) For the body is not one member, but many.”*

### **John 17:22-24**

*“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; (23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (24) “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

The glory given to Jesus was the entire process of redeeming the chosen people to God. Jesus passed this weighty process onto the disciples so that they may all be united in the Father’s task of building the church throughout the world. By now (2013 AD), the Trinity has been building the church for almost 2000 years and it has been through a lot of molding and pruning that we can see from church history. I am pretty sure that I would have been greatly discouraged in the early 1500’s and again now as the church is becoming more synchronous with the world’s value systems. I find it hard to find much unity across the world and such disunity certainly does not tend to make it seem that God did send Jesus with His great love for the brethren. It did not take long for Satan to invade the church and perturb it from its primary task of showing this unified love among all disciples. Paul wrote of people preaching another Jesus, a different spirit, and a

different gospel (2 Cor 11:4). He also wrote of false apostles who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ (2 Cor 11:13) and of Satan's servants disguising themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor 11:15). He also wrote of dangers that he faced from false brethren (2 Cor 11:26). John also wrote about people leaving the church because they were not really His disciples (1 John 2:19). Elijah also became discouraged but God told him that he would keep 7000 as true disciples of Him (1 Kings 18:19). So today we also need to trust God that He is still working in developing His church. Jesus ends this portion of His prayer by stating again how He was loved by the Father before the creation of all that now exists. The best estimate at this time is that the universe is 13.8 billion years old so plan A has been in place for a long time from our perspective.

### **John 17:25-26**

*"O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; (26) and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

The title "righteous Father" parallels "Holy Father" of verse 11 as both appear only in this prayer. Of course only the Father is righteous and holy so the titles are appropriate. The Father will glorify Jesus by vindicating Him in His work and accepting Him back home. Only Jesus has been able to speak of God from an intimate acquaintance rather than some philosophical speculation. The plan of Jesus was to make the disciples as knowledgeable as possible of the Father so that the love of the Father for Jesus may also be in them as well as Jesus being in them. This absolute oneness is to define the church so that the world will know that Jesus Christ is Lord. One day all will bow to Him but for many of them it will be too late. This promise goes back in time to Isaiah and then forward to the teaching of the apostle Paul:

- Isa 45:23 NASB "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.
- Phil 2:9-10 NASB For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, (10) so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- Rom 14:11-12 NASB For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." (12) So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

Today (2013 AD) all Christians need to pray for guidance to continue building the church properly for we will all have to give an account to God.