

Notes on John 17

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Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples – Chap. 17

Verse 1

1. What did Jesus ask the Father to do and what would He do for the Father? (Think: What “hour” had come?)

Jesus prayed for the Father to glorify Him, that He might glorify the Father.

Jesus had finished His final instructions to the apostles. The discussion is closed by a prayer Jesus prayed to the Father. Jesus was often in prayer, and it was surely appropriate that this final discussion with them on the night before His death should end with prayer.

He lifted up His eyes to heaven. Sometimes people prayed with heads bowed or even kneeling or prostrate. But on this occasion, Jesus looked up. The attitude of heart, not the physical position, is the essential point.

“The hour has come” surely refers to the time of His death. He knew it was coming. He had known it and announced it repeatedly to His disciples. All the plans of God throughout the ages centered around this “hour.” It was the hour that the prophets had predicted, the hour that Jesus had come to earth for, the hour that would make possible the salvation of all mankind. For Jesus, it was the hour of His greatest trial, His greatest humiliation, His most difficult task. He faced it with prayer.

He asked the Father to glorify Him, so He could glorify the Father. See on 13:31,32, where it is clear these expressions refer to the death of Jesus on the cross and the glory that resulted to Him and to the Father when He was raised from the dead (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus' death would seem a tragedy at the time. For Jesus, it would be an incredible shame, sorrow, and disgrace (Heb. 12:2,3): the greatest humiliation of His life. But He endured it because He knew the results that would follow. Mankind could be saved only in this way, and it would result in His glory as He arose. Then He would give glory to the Father and lead men to become right with Him. See v5 below for a greater description.

Verse 2

2. Over what did Jesus have authority, and what could He give?

The Father gave Jesus' authority so He could give men eternal life.

Jesus had authority over all flesh (cf. Matt. 28:18). He had possessed Deity from the beginning, as the Creator of all (John 1:1-3; 20:28; Phil. 2:5ff). That would give Him inherent power over all. All people everywhere must obey Jesus' word. He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12). He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He possessed glory with the Father before the world began (v5). Note that He would have authority over all flesh: not just one nation (the Jews), but all people of all nations.

He had power to give eternal life to all who belonged to Him (see notes on 10:28; cf. 1 John 5:11,12). He is the way, the truth, and the life, the only way people can come to the Father (John 14:6). There is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). God gives eternal life through Him (Rom. 6:23).

In what sense did the Father “give” Jesus this power (cf. John 3:35)? The Father is, in some sense, higher than the Son (1 Cor. 11:3; 15:28). Yet, to possess Deity would mean to have authority already over all created things. Perhaps it here refers only to the fact that the Son would be given power to grant eternal life. He already had power to rule the universe, but it was necessary for Him to die in order to have power to give eternal life according to God's plan.

Another possibility is that, when Jesus came to earth to live as a man, He came as a man subject to the Father's authority as a servant like men are (Phil. 2:5ff). While He was still Deity

on earth, He was **acting** as a man to learn obedience. He was not exercising the full authority of Deity. At this point in His life, His period of subjection was almost over and He was about to return to full exercise of His authority, and this is expressed as the Father giving Him power. (See on v5.)

Verse 3

3. How did Jesus describe eternal life? (Think: How is the word “know” used here? See cross references.)

True eternal life is to know the Father, the only true God, and to know Jesus whom the Father sent.

Having mentioned eternal life (v2), Jesus proceeds to describe how men may receive it. To “know” here means to have a personal relationship of fellowship and harmony. Man in sin is alienated from God (Isa. 59:1f), and is an enemy of God. In that sense, he does not know God. He may know who God is, but does not personally have a relationship with Him. That comes only if we obey Him (1 John 2:3ff; see notes on 15:21; 16:3). Only if one “knows God,” in this sense of a personal relationship, can he have eternal life.

But note that eternal life does not come by loving the Father only. Jesus says plainly here that, to have eternal life, people must also know or have fellowship with Jesus Christ. What a claim! The clear implication is that people cannot have eternal life unless they recognize who Jesus is and have a relationship with Him! Consider the consequences for religions that fail to recognize Jesus and for even professed believers who do not serve Him properly. See on John 14:6.

By calling the Father, “the only true God,” Jesus did not exclude Himself from Deity. He is making a statement that cannot possibly be true unless He Himself possesses Deity. What mere man could claim that people must know Him, along with God the Father, in order to have eternal life! Such was clearly a claim to Deity; and other passages, even in John, clearly show that Jesus does possess Deity (see on v2 above). Calling the Father “the only true God” is just an affirmation that the Father possesses Deity, and there is only one true God. Hence, the Deity the Father possessed is the true Deity of the only God, just like Jesus Himself possessed. He and the Father are one (see on 17:20,21). (Some translations include Jesus here in the “only true God.”)

To illustrate, suppose I hold up a Bible and say, “This is the only true word of God.” I spoke the truth because the message is the only true message from God. But there are many other copies like it, and each of them can be called “the only true word of God.” The statement does not deny that other copies exist, but affirms that the nature of the message is unique, etc. A message that is **different** is not the true message. So, Jesus’ statement did not deny that other Beings possessed this unique Divine nature. But He was affirming that the nature of Deity was truly unique. “Gods” which are claimed to have Deity but which are **different** in nature, are not truly God. Jesus is not a different god, but the exact image of the Father (Heb. 1:1ff). Cf. Jude 4 where Jesus is called our only Master and Lord. Does this exclude the Father from being Master and Lord?

Verses 4,5

4. What did Jesus do on earth, and how did He do it? (Think: In what sense was this true? Was Jesus’ main purpose accomplished yet?)

5. How did Jesus describe the glory He would receive?

6. **Special Assignment:** What does this glory demonstrate about Jesus’ nature?

Jesus glorified God by finishing His work, so He asked to return to the glory He had with the Father before the world began.

Jesus on earth had given glory to the Father already by doing the Father’s will, obeying Him, teaching others about Him, and showing men how we ought to serve God. But there was a greater glory yet to come after Jesus died and arose (v1).

Jesus said He had finished the work the Father gave Him. This speaks of the work as a completed thing, though the last great deed was yet to be done. But to Jesus it was the same as done (cf. v11). Compare this to a ballgame where one team is so far ahead that the outcome is clearly determined. Even though the game is not yet completed, people say, "It's over." So, Jesus was totally committed to the task; nothing would stop the course of events now. Hence, it was as done. So, He reminds the Father that this should lead to His glory as they had planned.

See also how Jesus prepared Himself to endure the horror facing Him. He looked past the trauma to the glory that would follow. He was so settled in His mind that it was as though it was done, so He emphasized the positive good that would result. Difficult as it may be, we would benefit greatly by dealing with our problems this way as well.

Note that Jesus had glory with the Father before the world began. He was with the Father then, hence they are both eternal (1:1-3). And He had glory with the Father. They shared the same glory, hence Jesus must have possessed Deity. What mere man could make such a claim as this? Having accomplished this work, He would return to that position of glory. All men would honor Jesus even as they honor the Father (5:23). On earth, He had surrendered this glory, not claiming and exercising it (though He surely deserved it). Now that the work was complete, He would return to claim it again. Cf. Phil. 2:5-12. God absolutely refuses to allow anyone but Deity to have the glory of God (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). If Jesus had glory with the Father, then He must possess Deity.

And furthermore, note that the Father and Son are clearly here two separate individuals. There is an "I" and a "You." Jesus said, "Glorify **Me** together with **Yourself**." There was an individual whom Jesus calls "Me," and an individual whom He calls "Yourself": two separate individuals who were "together with" one another. And both possess Deity, since both share the same glory.

Verses 6-8

7. What people are described in v6, and what did Jesus do for them?

8. What did these people come to know (v7)?

9. What did Jesus do with the message of the Father, and what did the people believe as a result (v8)?

Jesus had made the Father known to the disciples.

Jesus had made known the Father's name to men. The name stands for the person, His character, work, reputation, etc. Jesus had revealed the Father (1:18). By seeing Jesus' life and hearing His teaching, we know what the Father is like (14:7-11; see also on 17:26).

He did this for the men who had belonged to the Father, but were given to Him by the Father. He had earlier said that He possessed all things that belonged to the Father (16:15), and He would soon repeat this (17:10). Again, He is not attributing Deity to the Father which He denies for Himself. On the contrary, who but Deity could properly claim that all God's people belong to Him and He possesses all things that belong to the Father?

V10 continues to explain by showing that these people belong to both the Father and the Son. The Father had given Jesus the responsibility of caring for them on earth. This was the plan of God. Jesus would be the One to come and teach, then die on earth. The Father did not do this, but the Son did. Hence, the responsibility was put in the Son's hand. This does not prove He was not Deity, for equals can give things to one another.

The result of Jesus' work was to convince the disciples that what He taught was really from the Father. He was not a man making up doctrines of His own. His power was Divine and the message was from God. He was acting as a man, but He had Divine approval for all He said and did. This is the sense in which, as a man, He proved to the people that what He had was from God.

Not only did they know who Jesus was, but they kept the teachings from the Father that Jesus gave them. Of course, they often failed and would fail tragically before another day had

passed. But they returned to the Lord and continued to seek His will to do it. Note that a proper relationship with God requires keeping His word, not just learning it or just believing it.

Verses 9,10

10. For whom was Jesus praying and for whom was He not praying?

11. What did Jesus mean by “the world,” and what had He earlier taught the disciples about how the world would treat them?

12. What did Jesus claim in v10, and where else had He claimed this?

Jesus prays for those whom the Father had given Him.

Note that Jesus’ prayer has turned from praying for Himself to praying for the apostles. He will eventually turn to praying for those who come to believe in Him through the apostles (v 21ff).

Jesus repeats, as in vv 4-8, that the disciples belonged to the Father but were given to Him. Note again that Jesus possesses all who belong to the Father (cf. 16:15). How could this be if He is not Deity? What mere man could rightly make such a claim?

However, Jesus added that this prayer was being offered for these who belonged to Himself and to the Father. He was not praying for the world. He had explained to the apostles how the world would treat them (15:18-21). He was praying for the disciples, knowing the hardships they would face in the world (see v14,15). Though He Himself was about to endure the hardships of the cross, yet His prayer was for the disciples.

This does not mean that Jesus did not love the world or that He never prayed for the world. It surely does not refer to the Calvinist concept that Jesus loves and cares for only the unconditionally elect and not for others. His point is only that, at this particular point, His prayer is for the disciples, not for the world. Many other Scriptures show that He does love the world (3:16). In fact, He did pray for the world before this prayer was over (vv 21,23). He bids His disciples to even pray for their enemies - Matthew 5:44. Why would He not pray for lost sinners for whom He was about to die?

Verses 11,12

13. In what sense were the disciples still in the world but Jesus was not in the world (cf. v4)?

14. What did Jesus pray the Father would do for the apostles in v11? In what sense is the word “keep” used here (cf. vv 12,15)?

15. What had Jesus done for the apostles (v12)? Who is the son of perdition? (Think: What promise or assurance should Christians find in what Jesus said He did?)

The plan to keep those who the Father had given to Jesus.

Jesus was leaving the world (He was actually still in the world – v13 - but he speaks as if He was already not here, meaning that it is as sure to happen as if it is already accomplished – cf. v4). He had left heaven to come to the world to accomplish a purpose. Now His purpose here was accomplished (v4), so He was going back to the Father.

Yet, He was concerned for the apostles, because they would have to remain in the world facing the hardships that He knew were ahead of them. His prayer was that the Father would keep them and that they may be one as He and the Father were one (see vv 20,21 on this point). They had surely had difficulties with conflict and rivalries among them when Jesus was on earth. So, He prayed for their protection and unity in the work after He left them.

To keep them is to protect them. Jesus had kept (protected) them while He was on earth, so none of them was lost except the son of perdition (Judas) as the Scripture had predicted. This shows that “keeping” them means protecting them from being lost. In v15 He prayed the Father to “keep them” from the evil one.

The expression “son of perdition” implies that perdition or destruction was the destiny to which Judas’ nature would lead him. His loss was the fulfillment of Scripture, in that it had been

predicted that one would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, etc. (Zechariah 11:12; Psalms 41:9; 109:8). It does not mean that Judas had no choice in the matter (see on 13:21-30).

Nothing here teaches “once saved, always saved,” as Judas’ case proves (see notes on 10:28,29). A person can fall because of disobedience or neglect of his own doing. Yet, we have the great promise that God does not want us lost and will work to keep us saved. He will not force us against our will to do right, but He will work against the outside forces of the “world” so they cannot overwhelm and compel us to be lost even as we strive diligently to do right (1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 4:13).

It is passages such as these that answer those who worry about, “What if I live a long, faithful life, and then in a moment of weakness I sin and get hit by a truck and die before I can repent?” I may not know how God works, but the clear teaching of verses such as this is that God is working for my good to see that such things do not happen. I do not need some elaborate theory to explain how He will prevent it. And I definitely should not concoct some explanation that denies the need for repentance and prayer when I sin, or worse yet that denies it is possible for a child of God to so sin as to be lost. I often do not understand **how** God achieves His purposes, but faith trusts Him to do right. I can put my faith in God that, if I am diligently striving to do right, He is not going to let me be lost over some matter which could easily have been resolved had I just had a few more hours to live.

Verses 13,14

16. What reason did Jesus give for what He had taught (v13)? Where else had He stated this?

17. How did the world treat the apostles, why was this so, and where else had Jesus stated this?

The world hates Jesus’ disciples, yet He spoke so they could have joy.

Jesus’ instructions in chap. 14-16 were intended to give the disciples joy, despite the hardships they would face (15:11; 16:24). There is joy in serving Jesus and receiving the blessings He provides, but the disciples would face difficult circumstances that would threaten that joy. Jesus’ joy cheers us because of our relationship to Him, regardless of external circumstances and the treatment we receive from the world. See Matthew 13:44; 25:21,23; Luke 6:23; 10:20; Acts 5:41; 8:39; 13:52; 16:34; Romans 15:13; Galatians 5:22; Philippians 2:17; 3:1; 4:4; Colossians 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:6,8; 4:13.

The world had hated the apostles and would continue to do so, because Christians are different from the world like Jesus was (see 15:18-21). The world still hates God’s people today. But Jesus gave the word to guide and strengthen the apostles through these trying times. That same word can do the same for us today.

As on 15:18-21, the reason the world hates us is that we are different from the world. The upright lives of disciples constitute a rebuke against the sins of those who do not serve God, and our teaching shows their error. If they are not willing to repent, they will resent us (cf. 3:19-21), just as they resented Jesus. This is what motivates persecution. Could it be that the world does not hate us, because we are not really different from the world as we ought to be?

Verses 15,16

18. What did Jesus pray for the disciples and what did He not pray (v15)?

19. **Application:** In what sense are Christians in the world but not of the world? What lessons can we learn?

We are in the world, but not of the world.

Jesus’ prayed for the apostles, not that they would avoid the problems of the world by being removed from it, but that they would have the means to overcome the evil one. God would “keep them” from him (cf. vv 11,12). Even though we continue in the world, Jesus said we are not “of” the world like He was not. We should be in the world but not of the world.

He had already shown we are different from the world, so the world hates us (v14; cf. 15:18-21). The danger is that disciples living in the world may become like the world. We must resist that danger with all our power (Rom. 12:2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). The world in general is not serving God. As we become too attached to the things of the world, we may likewise become indifferent toward God's service. Peer pressure is a powerful force to lead us to the "evil one."

However, it is easy to become so angered and frustrated by the temptations and opposition we face that we seek to leave the world entirely. We wish to escape the pressures of the world by going off by ourselves in a monastery, convent, or commune with just people who share our religious views. Jesus did not pray this for the apostles, so we must not seek it for ourselves. We have a duty to fulfill in the world and that is to be an example of what God's people should be like. By our teaching and our lives, we should strive to lead the world to Jesus (Matt. 5:16; Mark 16:15,16; etc.). To do this, we must have contact with people of the world. Jesus Himself was criticized for associating with sinners, and He explained that He did it to bring them to repentance (Luke 5:29-32). So, Jesus sent us "into the world" (v18).

This does **not** mean, however, as some mistakenly claim, that we should make no efforts to protect ourselves from the world's temptations. The disciples did not leave the world, but there were definitely times when they would leave certain people and circumstances in order to escape persecution or temptation. They would often flee.

We are warned that evil companions corrupt good morals and we must avoid tempting circumstances (Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12). Some places, circumstances, and people place strong temptations on us, yet there is no good reason for us to be there. So, we ought to flee those circumstances and people, not to completely leave the world, but to maintain our spiritual integrity. This is especially true for children and new converts, since they lack spiritual maturity to deal with temptation. We are in a warfare with Satan, and armies should not put raw, untrained recruits on the front line. So, a family ought not to totally isolate children from evil, but should protect them from it and gradually allow them to contact it as they are able to deal with it.

Verses 17-19

20. Define "sanctify" and list 2 other places where it is used.

21. Explain the connection between sanctification and truth.

22. List two other passages showing the truthfulness of God's word, and explain the significance of this fact to Christians.

Sanctification by the truth of God's word

Jesus repeated that He was sending the apostles into the world as the Father sent Him into the world (see notes on vv 15,16). But though they must be in the world, they should be sanctified by God's word, the truth, just as Jesus had sanctified Himself by the truth.

"Sanctify" means to be made holy or set apart for special purposes. Sanctification or holiness is a common theme in the Bible. Jesus here said that He had sanctified Himself. God is holy, and we should be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). A person who is sanctified or holy is a "saint," so Christians are often called in the gospel (Acts 9:13; 1 Cor. 1:2; etc.).

To be holy we must keep ourselves pure from sin. Sin is what defiles our souls and ruins our relationship to God. To be set apart to Him, we must overcome sin (the world and the evil one) and must be cleansed of all sins we commit (Heb. 2:12).

This is done through the word. How? First, the word instructs us how to become sanctified by having our sins removed by Jesus' blood (1 Cor 6:11; Heb. 10:10,29; 13:12; Eph. 5:26). When we learn and obey the teachings of the gospel, Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin.

But it is not just a matter of being forgiven. One who is forgiven then belongs to God and must use his life for God (1 Cor. 6:19,20; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 12:1,2; chap. 6). He is sanctified or set apart to God's service, dedicated to live obediently to God, different from the world. God's word tells us how to do this.

God's word is the truth that produces this sanctification. God's word is always true for God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Psalm 119:128,160; 19:7-11). Men often lie or are at least mistaken (Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4). God never lies and cannot be mistaken. Hence, His word is always true. But it is the truth that makes us free from sin (John 8:31-34). The Holy Spirit was to reveal to the apostles all truth from God (John 16:13). Hence, the word of God, revealed in the Scriptures, is the only completely reliable and sure guide for our spiritual lives. Only it is infallibly true and cannot be wrong.

So while Christians must not leave the world but continue to live in the world (vv 15,16), yet they are sanctified from the world in that they are cleansed from sin and dedicated to God's service, so they refuse to participate in the world's evils (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

"Sanctify" (ἁγιαζω) — "...render or declare sacred or holy, consecrate. Hence it denotes 1. to render or acknowledge to be venerable, to hallow ... 2. to separate from things profane and dedicate to God, to consecrate and so render inviolable ... 3. to purify ... a. to cleanse externally ... b. to purify by expiation, free from the guilt of sin ... c. to purify internally by reformation of soul..." — Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Verses 20,21

23. For whom was Jesus praying (v20)?

24. How do people today come to believe in Jesus? Explain the connection between faith and the word.

25. **Special Assignment:** Explain the sense in which Jesus and His Father are "one." According to vv 20-23, are they the same individual?

26. According to vv 20-23, what does it mean for people to be "in" one another? (Think: How does this help us understand other teachings such as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?)

27. List two other passages about unity or division, and explain the consequences for denominational division.

28. How can the world benefit from unity among Christians?

Jesus continues His prayer, but now prays for a different group. He had prayed for Himself, then for the apostles. Now He prays, not just for them, but for all who believe in Jesus through the teaching of the apostles.

His prayer was that His disciples should be one, even as He and His Father are one. This passage is of major importance regarding several Bible doctrines.

Jesus and His Father: one God but two separate individuals

Some people claim that Jesus and His Father are the same Being or individual. They argue this on the basis of passages that say Jesus and the Father are "one" (see notes on 10:30).

But Jesus here explained that He and His Father are one like His disciples should be "one." How are we to be "one"? Do we all become **one and the same individual**: one living being? If the Father and Son are one individual, then to please Jesus all His disciples must become one individual — an impossibility! But if we are not all one individual, but the Father and Son are one **even as** we are one, then the Father and Son cannot be one individual. We remain separate individuals, but we are one in purpose, faith, goals, character, doctrine, practice, etc. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 12:12-20,25-27; Eph. 4:1-4; etc.).

So, this passage explains **how** the Father and Son are one. The inspired comparison is that there is **one God** or Godhead that consists of plural members, just as there is **one** church that consists of many members (see references below).

Further, the Father and Son are described as **"You" and "Me,"** clearly identifying two separate individuals. Further, Jesus (the "I") addresses the "You" as His "Father." An individual and his father make two individuals. They are also called **"we"** (v22): **plural** individuals. In many other passages the pronouns for Jesus and His Father imply plural individuals ("we," "us," "I and You," "I am not alone," etc.). See notes on 8:16-18 and on 1:1-3.

Statements affirming the oneness of God are intended to contrast to the plural gods as in heathen idol worship, not to deny there are a plurality of individuals in God. When contexts affirm that there is one God, they generally are not discussing the relationship of Father and Son, but are contrasting the true God to the plurality of different gods such as heathen idol worshippers embrace: gods having different character, authority in different areas of life or different areas of the earth, and often disagreeing and even warring among themselves in their beliefs, purposes, teachings, and their wills for men. We worship, not such gods as these, but a united, harmonious God with one will and plan for us, yet consisting of three separate individuals: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father, Son, and disciples “in” one another

Jesus also here expressed His relationship with God by saying the Father was in Him and He in His Father. Yet, some again misunderstand.

Many other passages speak of separate persons being “*in*” one another. To say one is “in” the other does not prove they are the same individual. For example, Christians are “in Christ” and “in the Father”; and Father and Son abide “in” us — John 14:20,23; 15:4-7; 3:21; 6:56; Rom. 8:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 2:20; 3:26-38; Eph. 3:17; Phil. 1:1; 3:8,9; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 5:14; 1 John 2:6,24; 3:24; 4:12-16. Do these verses prove that we are the same individual or personal being as the Son or the Father?

Note also that the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians — 2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19. This concept really confuses many people. They somehow believe this must refer to a direct, personal inhabitation of our bodies by the Holy Spirit.

But again, John 17:20-23 explains the real meaning of the expression. For Jesus to be “in the Father,” and vice-versa, simply means for them to be “one.” “That they all may be *one*; as Thou, Father, art *in Me*, and *I in Thee*, that they also may be *one in us...*; that they may be *one*, even as *We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me*, that they may be made perfect in *one...*”

To say that one person is “in” another simply means that they have fellowship and unity: a close, harmonious, united relationship. It does not mean they are one individual. This is how the Father and Son were in one another, how they are in us and we are in them, and how the Holy Spirit is in us. See 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 1:5-7. (Compare John 1:18 — in the bosom of the Father.)

For further discussion of the number of individuals in the Godhead and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, see our articles on these subjects on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

The importance of unity

This passage is also a major plea of Jesus for unity among His disciples. He said this unity would help prove to the world that Jesus was sent by the Father.

Yet those who claim to believe in Jesus are tragically divided. And incredibly, many people make arguments that would justify or prolong this division. They say, “It doesn’t matter what church you attend as long as you are sincere.” “One interpretation of the Bible is just as good as another.” “The grace of God will cover people of all faiths.” And even, “Having different denominations is an advantage because people can find whatever group suits them.”

Yet, all this clearly contradicts the Jesus’ prayer for unity. In what sense are Jesus and His Father “one”? That is the sense in which He wanted us to be “one.” Do they argue and disagree about how to worship, what church to be a member of, how to be forgiven of sin, etc.? No, they have harmony about these things.

Many other Scriptures demand unity among God’s people, condemn division, and teach there is only one true church and one true faith: Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20; Jude 3. (See also Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14,16; 4:16; Phil. 1:27; 2:2; etc.)

Does this mean we should achieve harmony by overlooking contradictions and disagreements and just “loving one another so much” that doctrinal conflict does not matter? Is this how the Father and Son achieve unity? No, they achieved unity by both accepting and teaching the same things (John 12:49,50).

Many Scriptures teach us to stand for the truth and oppose error: Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4. When we do so, if there are people who do not accept the teaching (as will often happen), division will result. It often resulted when Jesus taught, as is shown in John (see 10:19 and notes and references on similar passages). But this is the fault, not of those who stand for the truth, but of those who reject truth. There will always be division between those who accept truth and those who do not. Jesus teaches unity on the basis of faithfulness to the will of the Father.

Other lessons

Further note that we believe in Jesus through the word of the apostles (cf. John 20:30,31; Rom. 10:17). The word is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). Scriptural faith does not come because God directly speaks to us or sends us a personal direct revelation. We believe through the testimony of the apostles (15:27), whose testimony is revealed today in the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

Verses 22,23

29. What blessing did Jesus give the disciples (v22)?

Jesus gives His disciples glory that they may be one.

These verses continue from vv 20,21. Jesus adds that the result of this being one with the Father and Son will be that Jesus gives us the glory that the Father gave Him. The glory here is explained to be the glory of being one with them and having them in us. As Jesus received glory for His sacrifice to save us, so He gives us glory if we serve Him (Hebrews 2:9,10). This does not mean that we receive that special glory that belongs only to Deity, which Jesus had with the Father before the world began (v5). We should never be glorified as fully as God is glorified. Yet, we can have the glory of spiritual unity and fellowship with the three Beings of Deity. That should be glory enough for anyone.

Further, because of this oneness, there is a special love God has for His people, even as He had for Jesus (see 14:21-24). As a result of our unity with God, the glory we receive will include an acknowledgement by the world that God sent Jesus and that God loves us just as surely as He loved Jesus. And He repeats that this unity would help the world believe in Him. It is sad, but true, that by causing division among those who claim to follow Jesus, Satan has significantly hindered the world's acceptance of Jesus as God's Son.

Verse 24

30. What blessing did Jesus request for the disciples in v24?

Jesus offers us the joy of beholding His glory with the Father.

Jesus had earlier said He was going to prepare a place that His disciples could come and be where He was (see notes on 14:1ff). He here prayed to the Father stating His desire for His disciples to be with Him where He was, that they could behold the glory the Father gave Him. He repeated that the Father loved Him before the foundation of the world.

This surely appears to discuss the eternal reward of the faithful disciples. He had said that He was going back to the Father, and there the Father would restore to Him the glory He had before the world began (vv 13,5). If so, then it must mean that our eternal reward will be a home in heaven in the presence of the Father and the Son. Heaven is surely where Jesus will be. If we are to “be with Him where He is,” then we too must be in heaven. One of Jesus' final appeals, before His arrest and crucifixion, was that we could be with Him in eternity to see His glory. See also 1 Thess. 4:17; 5:9,10; Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 1:3,4.

Verses 25,26

31. What did Jesus know that the world did not know? What did His disciples know? (Think: How does this relate to v3)?

32. What work had Jesus accomplished and why (v26)?

Jesus declared God's name, so we may share in God's love.

Jesus concluded His prayer by repeating (as He had said various times earlier) that the world did not know the Father. Yet, Jesus knew the Father, and His disciples knew that God had sent Jesus.

Jesus' purpose here had been to declare the Father to the people (1:18). He said He had accomplished that declaration and would continue to declare it. The result would be that the disciples would have God's love in them, even as the Father had loved the Son. (See verses above.)

This concludes that last record we have of Jesus' message to His disciples and His prayer on their behalf before He died and gave Himself as our sacrifice. Surely, this last words should carry significance and meaning to us, so that we give them serious study.

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