

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB\_JN17A\_The Real Lord’s Prayer)***

#### **Introduction – John 17:1-26**

This chapter concludes that section of John (chapters 13-17) devoted to documenting Jesus’ preparation of the disciples for His departure. You may recall Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet in chapter 13, an act of servitude that Jesus used to demonstrate the type of leadership His kingdom honors and promotes.<sup>1</sup> This was followed by three chapters (14-16) that are devoted to documenting Jesus’ instruction of His disciples in preparation for His departure.

These chapters include Jesus’ teaching on such topics as the promise of a divine counselor (14:15-31), the necessity to abide in Him (15:1-10), the need for love of one another and unity (15:11-17), the world’s hatred (15:18-16:4), and a description of the work of the Holy Spirit (16:5-15) as well as predictions of His death and resurrection (16:16-33).

This prayer should not be read in isolation from what has just transpired, nor should it be excluded, as some do, from the flow of thought in the evening’s discourse as recorded by John. Rather, it is a continuation of the expression of Jesus’ concern for His own, now addressed to His Father rather than to the disciples.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus concludes chapter 16 with the declaration that “I have overcome the world” (16:33). This declaration indicates that Jesus was so surrendered to the Father’s will for His life that His victorious death on the Cross was already an accomplished fact in His mind. With His preparation of the disciples completed, He turns to the heavenly Father and prays a prayer that is as beautiful in its simplicity as it is profound in its significance.

*The Father’s authority – a prevalent theme* – In this chapter, Jesus knew that the “hour” for Him to fulfill God the Father’s eternal plan for Him had come – a plan that had been established in eternity past (Jn 1:1-2; 18 cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Pe 1:2, 20). There are a number of words or phrases that Jesus uses repeatedly in this chapter.

- “Father” – used three times (vv. 1, 5, 21, 24)
- “Holy Father” – (v. 11)
- “Righteous Father” – (v. 25)
- “You have given Me” or words to that effect – (vv. 2, 4, 6, 7-9, 21, 23-24)

These words and phrases resonate with an acknowledgement of the authority of God the Father and give us insight into a prevalent theme in this section of John’s Gospel – Jesus’ submission to the Father’s will and plan. Jesus, the eternal God Who determined to become man in accordance with the will of the Father from eternity past, received delegated authority from the Father during His incarnation in order to accomplish the eternal plan of redemption.

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<sup>1</sup> As the supreme example of leadership as the King of a different kingdom, the foundation of which is based upon different principles of power than man or angels had ever seen, Jesus humbled Himself as a servant to wash His disciples’ feet. The cosmic kingdoms are based upon principles and a system of power that at its root glorifies man or Satan depending upon the manner in which it is examined. God’s kingdom is based upon principles and a system of power that minimizes selfish interests in deference to the interests of others and of Christ. These are two diametrically opposed systems.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The DiscipleMaker – What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001), 248.

In chapter 17, Jesus prayed for Himself first (17:1-5). Next, Jesus prayed for His disciples (17:6-19). Finally, Jesus prayed for future believers (17:20-26). This provides a good outline for us to follow as we examine this beautiful chapter in John's Gospel.

### **Jesus Prays for Himself (17:1-5)**

The very beginning of Jesus' prayer in chapter 17 contains phrases and terms in addition to those mentioned in the introduction that give evidence to the theme of submission to the Father's plan and will:

- "The hour has come" – (v. 1). Contrast this with 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20 – the time had not yet come. The divine plan of redemption was to be executed according to God's timing.
- "You gave Him authority" – (v. 2). The Father was the source of Jesus' authority. This phrase gives us insight into the relationship between the members of the Trinity.

So, the essence of Jesus' prayer for Himself in verses 1-5 is that the Father's will and plan through Jesus would be fulfilled. The Father would thus be glorified as the Son accomplished the Father's plan and the Son was glorified (v. 1). Jesus' request for glorification involved the Father's response to His prayer by the following:

- sustaining Jesus in His suffering
- accepting His sacrifice
- resurrecting Him
- restoring Him to His pre-incarnate position in glory through the ascension

It is the believer's responsibility to glorify Jesus as God to the world (see v. 10). The *Westminster Larger Catechism*<sup>3</sup> indicates that this is the chief end of man, i.e. to glorify God. Scripture supports this point in such passages as Romans 11:36; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14.

In verse 3, Jesus uses some interesting terminology in association with the phrase "eternal life." The interpretation of this verse hinges in part upon one's interpretation of the Greek phrase hina + the present tense, subjunctive mood of ginosko. The basic meaning of the Greek word ginosko is "to know." Here, in John 17:3, hina is used to introduce an apposition clause, i.e. a clause that explains another noun or noun clause.<sup>4</sup> It, hina, carries the basic meaning in this construction of "namely" or "that." In this case, the noun clause that is explained by hina is "eternal

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<sup>3</sup> Question 1 in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* – "What is the chief end of man?" The answer per the catechism – "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever." Texts used to support this answer are Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Psalm 73:24-28; John 17:21-23; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* was the product of a Puritan led effort to reshape the Anglican Church of England in the 1640's. Parliament commissioned the Westminster Assembly composed of 151 English Puritans and 8 Scottish Presbyterians. The group held 1,163 daily sessions between 1643 and 1649 which resulted in several products including a *Directory of Worship* (accepted by the English and Scottish Parliaments in 1645); the *Form of Government* which advocated Presbyterian polity for the national church (adopted by Parliament in 1648); and the Calvinistic Westminster Confession of Faith (adopted by the Scots in 1647 and the English in 1648). "Thus the state church of England was a Calvinistic Presbyterian church by 1648. The constitutions of the larger American Presbyterian churches include all the above documents." See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries – A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1954, 1981), 340-341.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 475.

life” aionios zoe. A translation of this phrase and verse from Greek to English could be rendered – “This is **eternal life, namely, that they might keep on knowing You.**”<sup>5</sup>

So, is Jesus saying that eternal life is contingent upon something the believer continues to do, i.e. keep on knowing? Or, did Jesus mean something else here? Before we answer these questions, let’s look at some other interesting observations:

- This word ginosko is often used in the Septuagint and in the Greek New Testament to describe the intimacy associated with a sexual union.<sup>6</sup>
- This word ginosko carries the idea of to know by observation and experience – an intimate experiential knowledge.<sup>7</sup>
- It can be contrasted with another Greek word that is often translated “know” – oida – which means to know by reflection; a mental process based upon information.<sup>8</sup> It sometimes means “respect,” “honor” or “appreciate” as in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – “But we request of you brethren that you honor those who diligently labor among you...”
- When used with the subjunctive mood, the Greek term hina is used to indicate purpose.<sup>9</sup> This would lead to an interpretation that would lean toward interpreting hina as “in order that” or something to that effect.
- The idea that Jesus is seeming to convey here is not one of content, but essence. In other words, Jesus is focusing upon the experiential aspect of believers who continue in faith to grow in knowledge and application. This is the reason Jesus uses the subjunctive mood – to indicate that it is a possibility for His disciples.<sup>10</sup>
- It is also possible that the phrase “and Jesus Christ” could be regarded as a predicate accusative construction which would render the phrase – “Jesus as the Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

So, in brief, this Greek syntax indicates that Jesus was praying for His disciples who had already believed in Him. He desired that they experience the full benefits of eternal life in time.

Eternal life is a prominent theme in all of John’s literature. Even so, with all the attention he gives the subject, it is possibly one of the most misinterpreted themes he develops. This has resulted because it is normally read through the grid of a justification [*Phase 1 truth*] motif, where with John it is best understood in terms of its meaning in the daily life of the believer, a sanctification [*Phase 2 truth*] motif.<sup>12</sup> [*Italicized words are mine*].

The Reformed perspective on this verse approaches this verse from a justification-salvation perspective, i.e. an emphasis upon Phase 1 truths. It is true that eternal life is received

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<sup>5</sup> Compare Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 475 to Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1932, 1960), Volume V, 275.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 331.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, North Carolina: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992), 395.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Derickson and Radmacher, *The DiscipleMaker*, 263.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 275.

<sup>12</sup> Derickson and Radmacher, *The DiscipleMaker*, 256.

at the moment of personal faith (trust) in Christ. However, if one takes such an exclusive, Phase 1 perspective of the phrase “eternal life,” one encounters difficulties with this verse. One of the ways that those of this persuasion explain this verse is to indicate that there is an implicit idea that if one has eternal life, then one will produce results in his/her life. In other words, if one has eternal life, one will “know” ginosko God the Father in an experiential way.<sup>13</sup>

Now, the possession of life is foundational and productive. It will produce a fruit in the person’s life. But, a difference we have with typical Reformed Theology is that it seems to miss this dynamic growing quality of eternal life. For them, and the vast majority of Christians, it appears to be essentially static as something possessed. But the Bible is clear that there is far more to eternal life than an unending length of existence. There is a quality of life that can only come from God.<sup>14</sup>

In order to appreciate Jesus’ intent and meaning in this verse, we must see the full range and depth of meaning associated with this phrase “eternal life.” Eternal life (i.e. the Phase 2 experience) is a dynamic (even mystical) experience with God rather than a static relationship, although the experience of eternal life in time is based upon the static (Phase 1) truth that endures forever (Phase 3). The believer’s experience of eternal life depends upon obedience that leads to the experience of fellowship with Jesus who is the divine embodiment of eternal life. In interpreting the phrase “eternal life” in Johannine and Pauline Scripture we must realize that any of these aspects of meaning (i.e. Phase 1, 2 or 3) may be emphasized at any one time or more than one sense of the phrase may be in view in any given passage.

Jesus bases His prayer upon His completed work – “having accomplished the work” (v. 4). In this statement, Jesus assumed His obedience ‘til death which was only a few hours away. Even though the Cross was still a future event, Jesus considered it a certainty because He had purposed to do the Father’s will.

*Principle:* Accomplishment of the Father’s will for one’s life is contingent upon a yielded attitude and the determination of the course that one’s decisions will take in advance of making those decisions.

*Application:* If you are making decisions based upon how you feel, your mood, or any other attitudinal base that is ultimately dependent upon your emotions, you are not setting a course for your life that will result in the accomplishment of the Father’s will for your life.

*Application:* Thank God that Jesus had determined in advance of His crises the course that His decisions would take – a course consistent with the Father’s Will.

*Application:* When did Jesus steel His attitude to be one of total yieldedness to the Father’s will? Prior to the beginning of His public ministry – the only insight we have is the occasion He lingered in Jerusalem in the Temple discussing Scripture with the religious leadership of Israel (Lu 2:41-50). At the outset of His public ministry – forty days in the wilderness spent fasting (Matt 4:1ff). Several times during His public ministry – Jesus retreated to be alone in prayer and meditation (Matt 14:13, 23; 17:1; 26:36).

*Principle:* Good decisions in life cannot be divorced from advanced mental preparation.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 254-265.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 257.