

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN17B_The Real Lord’s Prayer_Continued)

Introduction

Many have called this prayer in John 17 our Lord’s “high priestly prayer.” While this title is a bit misleading, there is perhaps no better way of describing it. It is misleading in a sense because Jesus had not yet ascended into heaven and began His intercessory ministry. Nevertheless, his prayer represents a foretaste of that ministry.

In our prior lesson, we observed that one of the major themes that emerges in Jesus’ prayer is His acknowledgement and submission to the authority of the heavenly Father. This theme becomes very evident when one examines the number of times Jesus mentions God the Father as the source of everything in Jesus’ ministry, not to mention the number of times Jesus addresses the heavenly Father as “Father,” “Holy Father,” “Righteous Father.” For instance, consider the following phrases:

- ✓ “You [God the Father] have given Him [Jesus] authority over all flesh” (v. 2)
- ✓ “That He [Jesus] should give eternal life to as many as You [God the Father] have given Him” (v. 2)
- ✓ “Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (v.3)
- ✓ “I have glorified You” (v. 4)
- ✓ “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (v. 4)
- ✓ “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me” (v. 4)
- ✓ “O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (v. 5) [*The human Jesus was not manifesting His deity to the world even though He declared and manifested the Father’s righteousness*]
- ✓ “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world” (v. 6)
- ✓ “They were Yours, You gave them to Me” (v. 6)
- ✓ “All things which You have given Me are from You” (v. 7)
- ✓ “I have given to them the words which You have given Me” (v. 8)
- ✓ “They have believed that You sent Me” (v. 8)
- ✓ “Those whom you have given Me” (v. 9)
- ✓ “Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me” (v. 11)
- ✓ “Those whom You gave Me I have kept” (v. 12)
- ✓ “I have given them Your Word” (v. 14)
- ✓ “You sent Me into the world” (v. 18)
- ✓ “The glory which You gave Me” (v. 22)
- ✓ “That the world may know that You have sent Me” (v. 23)
- ✓ “I desire that they also whom You gave Me” (v. 24)
- ✓ “These have known that You sent Me” (v. 25)

This thematic understanding of Jesus’ prayer is very important to the way in which we interpret certain phrases in this chapter. *Does the fact that Jesus indicates that the Father has “given Him” men from the world support the Calvinist or Reformed understanding of the doctrine of election?* If I may be allowed to present an observation without being accused of being unkind or divisive (for that is not my intention), the Calvinist interpretation of these phrases of this chapter is defined or influenced by their doctrine of unconditional election. In other words, the passage at hand is not necessarily allowed to speak for itself in view of its greater context. Rather, the doctrine of unconditional election is imposed upon the passage in such a way that the interpretation of the passage is driven by the doctrine. Of course, this is a general statement and as is always the case, there are exceptions. Not all who consider themselves “Calvinist” or “Reformed” believe the same thing on every point, just as not all who consider themselves to be part of another persuasion hold the same views on every point as others of that same persuasion.

Of course, this is what makes it all so confusing to the average believer – it's hard to learn all the points of a particular view and find someone who believes it.

So, back to our point – the emphasis of the chapter is upon Jesus' submission to the Father's will, plan and purpose for His life (see Philippians 2:5-11). All of these phrases need to be interpreted through that set of lenses. Remember, Jesus is just hours away from the Cross and He knows it. He has just completed His preparation of the disciples for that inevitable conclusion to His life and now He is transitioning through prayer to His own preparation.

A Verse-by-Verse Analysis of 17:6-11a – Jesus' Prayer for His Disciples

It is important to note that in these verses Jesus is praying for His disciples, specifically His apostles. Jesus prays to the Father that He will keep them safe in a hostile world and guard them from Satan. Jesus spends the first half of this section (vv. 6-11a) describing the reason for His request on behalf of the disciples. The second half of this section (vv. 11b-19) is focused upon His request of the Father that He will enable their faith to survive in the midst of a hostile world.

Verse 6 – Jesus indicates that He has manifested the “name” of the Father. The name of God manifests His essence (Ex 3:13-15; Isa 52:6). It is also important to note that believers (specifically the apostles in context) are God's gift to the Son. The Son exercised His authority over God's gift to Him by manifesting the Father's name. In Matthew 6:9-11, Jesus instructed His disciples in how to pray – “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” Malachi prophesied with the words of God Himself when He states “My name shall be great among the Gentiles” (Mal 1:11). The manifesting of the “name” of God is a repeated Old Testament theme (Isa 59:19; 66:19; Ps 113:3).

Principle: This verse points to the importance of Christ exercising a faithful stewardship of God's gift to Him – believers, i.e. the apostles specifically.

Application: What does this say about our responsibility to exercise faithful stewardship of the Father's gift to us – Christ and His work? Our lives should reflect Christ by reflecting the balance that exists between God's essence attributes.

The final phrase – “they have kept Your word” – in verse 6 has been the subject of additional confusion. It is best to interpret this phrase as a reference to Jesus' instruction as a whole which would make it almost equivalent to believing the gospel that He preached.¹ The word “keep” here has a variety of meanings including “to keep watch over, guard someone or something, to not lose, to protect, to observe, fulfill, pay attention to.”² Jesus' usage is more consistent with the last sense of the meaning of the word as is made clear in the following verses. “The disciples have responded to Jesus' revelation of the Father through His teachings by believing what He has told them.”³ They have responded with faith to Jesus' revelation.

¹ An interesting footnote in Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker, What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001) is contained on page 430. It references the work of D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 559 and states “a good case can be made that when in the Fourth Gospel Jesus refers to his words (plural) he is talking about the precepts he lays down, almost equivalent to ‘commands’... but when he refers to his word (singular) he is talking about his message as a whole, almost equivalent to ‘gospel.’” This means that in verse 6, Jesus is in effect acknowledging that the disciples have responded to Jesus' testimony.

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979), 814-15.

³ Derickson and Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 271.

This interpretation is in contrast to those that might desire to support the Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints by interpreting the word “keep” as “obey.” The Reformed doctrine of perseverance of the saints means that those who are truly “believers” will persevere to the end of their lives in faith.

However, a strong argument against this interpretation of “keep” to mean “obey” in this passage is the fact that Jesus uses the *perfect tense* which indicates a completed action with results that continue indefinitely into the future. More consistent with the meaning of the *perfect tense*, the disciples had believed (i.e. “kept” Jesus’ word) with results that continue indefinitely into the future.

If Jesus meant that the apostles had “obeyed,” then a question immediately arises about the failures of Peter and the others. Did their subsequent failures – tantamount to an act of disobedience – later negate Jesus’ statements in verse 6 that they had been given to Him? Were they no longer His as a result of the later failures? Foolishness and totally inconsistent with not only the grammar here, but everything else we know that was subsequently accomplished by God through these very men! Such a translation is also inconsistent with the meaning that Jesus Himself imparts to these words in the two verses to follow. An interpretive translation of this phrase might be rendered as follows – “they have given attention to your Word with effects that continue forever.”

Note that Jesus did not mention the frailty of His children; rather He mentioned their faith to the Father. However, in conversation with His own, He does predict that they will fall away and be scattered (Lu 22:31-34).

The focal point of that evening’s instruction to the disciples and prayer to the Father has been their weak faith that Jesus is attempting to bolster in anticipation of their temporary and aberrant actions in the following hours.⁴ Jesus’ intent is to prepare them for fellowship in the years to come, not to redeem them. Therefore, Jesus continues to discuss with His Father the content of what they believe in the verses to follow.

Verse 7-8 – Jesus acknowledges the disciples’ belief in Him and from whence He came. They knew that Jesus was the Son of God and believed it. They understood the doctrine of *kenosis* (Phil 2:7) that Paul later explained so eloquently. Jesus even uses the *perfect tense* again to emphasize the fact that they “knew.” They had believed that which the Jewish religious leaders refused to acknowledge. However, there was much that they didn’t know or understand at this point. This was in spite of their misunderstanding of many things that Jesus had taught.

Note that Jesus’ emphasis is upon the content of their faith, not their deeds. Jesus does not point to an obedient life. It is what they believe that is the point of His focus, not on how that belief is expressed, i.e. fruit manifested in works. This is not meant to minimize the importance of deeds produced by a believer that are borne of his/her walk with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 9 – Jesus notes that He is not praying for the “world,” but for His disciples. Jesus is just stating the purpose of His prayer. Note what is not meant by Jesus’ statement in this verse:

- ✓ Jesus’ statement does not nullify the Father and Christ’s love for the world and sinners.
- ✓ Jesus’ statement does not indicate that He did not die for the sins of the whole world.
- ✓ Jesus is also not stating that He doesn’t want all to believe. Even though there is not a place in Scripture where Jesus or any of the apostles ever pray for the salvation of a specific lost person, there are plenty of examples of prayer for the unsaved. In verse 20, Jesus begins to pray for those who will come to faith through the ministry of the eleven. Paul could be seen as having been included in that group.

⁴ Ibid., 272.

It is comforting to note that Christ is always praying for us and is always in the perfect will of God (Ro 8:34; Heb 7:25; 9:24). In addition, the Holy Spirit offers prayers on our behalf. Even though in our passage, Jesus was not yet functioning in the role of our high priest (Heb 7-10), He was already praying for those given and to be given to Him by the Father.

Verse 10 – Jesus makes a claim in this verse that no other human could possibly make. For Him to claim co-ownership of everything with the Father in this way is beyond anything that an ordinary man could claim.

How is Jesus glorified through His disciples? What does He mean here? Jesus anticipates His character and attributes being revealed to the world through the lives of these men in the same way He revealed the Father to the world through His own words and deeds (Matt 5:16). Since Jesus manifested the Father, should His disciples manifest Him, they would also manifest the essence of God.

Verse 11a – Jesus “endured” the Cross “despising the shame” (Heb 12:2-3) because of the joy that was set before Him. The “joy” that was set before Him was the crown. More than likely, Jesus was focused upon His ascension and exaltation to the place of Messianic authority at the right hand of the Father (Re 3:21).