

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

### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB\_JN17D\_The Real Lord’s Prayer\_Continued)***

#### **A Verse-by-Verse Analysis of 17:20-26 – Jesus’ Prayer for Believers**

In these verses, Jesus transitions to praying for those who would believe in Him in the future – specifically those who would believe as a result of the work of His disciples (see v. 20 – “those who believe in Me through their word”). Of course, by extension and by application, one could make a persuasive argument that Jesus was praying for all future believers to include the Church. However, this doesn’t mean that Jesus had the Church Age in mind when he prayed. As I mentioned at the outset of our study of John’s Gospel, there are spiritual truths that transcend the Church Age and the Kingdom Age so that when Jesus taught Kingdom Age “spiritual” truths, especially those relating to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, many automatically assume Jesus was focused on the Church Age in His teaching. The following cite expresses my understanding well.

Even though there are differences in dispensational groupings in the Bible, Paul tells us that it is God’s purpose “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him” (Eph 1:10). The truths considered in the upper room discourse are so similar to things in our own dispensation that most people take them to be identical. However, just about forty days later, after all of the post-resurrection instructions which the risen Christ has given them, they were still expecting Jesus to return to set up the restored Kingdom of Israel. There is not a hint that He taught them anything different from this. There is not a hint that He told them He was going to do something entirely new and different with them, namely form them into the Church which is His Body. But as suggested at the very beginning of this study John was written many years after Paul received his revelation about the Body of Christ which are parallel in large degree to the truths for the Church. It is a kind of doctrinal bridge.<sup>1</sup>

To properly understand the Gospels, especially those sections that are traditionally considered to anticipate the Church Age, it is important to keep the above in focus. So, to clarify the issue, let me ask and answer a question or two. Does Jesus’ prayer in chapter 17 include as beneficiaries those who would believe in the future Church Age? Yes. Did Jesus anticipate the Church Age believers in His prayer? Most likely not.<sup>2</sup>

These final seven verses in John 17 can be divided into two groupings based upon their subject matter. In verses 20-23, Jesus prays for their unity. In verses 24-26, Jesus prays for their future glorification.

#### **Jesus Prays for Unity (17:20-23)**

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<sup>1</sup> Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels, A Different Approach* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 265.

<sup>2</sup> I could probably answer this question as “definitely not” since the evidence seems to support it. However, it is not a point over which I would wish to split hairs with another believer who may hold to a “classic” or “revised” dispensational approach and who still acknowledges the primary distinction between Israel and the Church Age. I just believe that the view expressed places the dispensationalist in a better position to demonstrate a consistent interpretive precedent regarding the vital distinction between Israel and the Church Age. In addition, the spiritual similarities between the Kingdom Age and the Church Age are given their proper recognition.

20 I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (17:20-23)

In *verse 21*, Jesus uses the present tense of the Greek word *ei emi* which can be translated “continue being.” This is very important. Jesus is focusing His prayer upon the need for believers to be unified in their Phase 2 experiential walk (sanctification). The need for believers to be unified in their walk of faith and in truth (v. 17) for the purpose of being a witness to the world is a repeated theme in the upper room discourse (see 13:34-35; 17:11, 23 cf. 15:6). Ultimately, after the Messianic Kingdom on earth when the “new heavens and new earth” (tantamount to “heaven”) have been populated with believers of all dispensations for all of eternity, there will certainly be unity. There is unity in Phase 3 of the believer’s existence. There is also a certain unity in the Phase 1 experience of all believers of all dispensations even though there are distinctions. But Jesus was not praying for Phase 1 (positional sanctification or justification) or Phase 3 (ultimate sanctification) unity among believers.

The ecumenical movement of the past and present have used this verse as a rallying cry for their cause – to unite all people of all faiths. They argue that denominational distinctiveness and separation violate Jesus’ principle of love and unity that is prayed for here. Admittedly, God would desire that the Church in the present Age be a united body of believers in truth (doctrine – v. 17) and in walk (experiential sanctification in Phase 2). However, if one of these two elements is missing, there will be no unity between believers.

- ✓ How can one who claims you must be water baptized to be saved be unified in what they believe and practice with one who claims that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?
- ✓ How can one who believes that you must speak in tongues to be saved be unified in faith and practice with one who claims otherwise?
- ✓ How can the believer who is practicing adultery, fornication, promiscuous sex be unified in his/her walk with the believer who is practicing a life of sexual purity?
- ✓ How can the legalist be unified with the practitioner of grace?
- ✓ How can the spiritual believer be unified with the doctrinal and/or statement of beliefs of such organizations as the **World Council of Churches**.
- ✓ How can the believer who is spiritual be unified with the believer who is carnal?

All of these questions illustrate areas of legitimate disunity. As a matter of fact, believers are taught to separate from false teachers (xxx).

The unity that Christ prays for here is the same type of unity that the Father and the Son have (10:38; 17:11, 23) – “the Father is in Me and I in Him.” Just as the Father was able to do His work through His Son and the Son always did what pleased the Father (5:30; 8:29), Jesus prays that believers would also be in unity so that the world might believe that God the Father sent Jesus as His Son into the world (vv. 22-23). The fact that the unity to which Jesus refers is a reference to Phase 2 sanctification is enforced by Jesus’ desire that believers be made “perfect.” “The Greek concept of ‘perfect’ does not especially mean ‘perfection,’ flawless. Rather, it carries the sense of maturity and completeness.”<sup>3</sup> If this unity to which Jesus referred was simply an organic unity of Phase 1 positional sanctification, then it would really prove nothing to the world.

The principle of servanthood which Jesus enunciates to his followers...is the principle which he implies derives from the interpersonal fidelity and hospitality of

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker, What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001), 296.

each of the three persons of the Triune Family to one another...There is no claim to independent individuality (which would be tritheism) but an assertion of essential identification in loving communion...Servanthood and generosity are the key to life in the divine Community.”<sup>4</sup>

The unity of believers also demonstrates another thing to the world. Through the unity that believers demonstrate to the world, the world sees just how much God has loved believers. This passage teaches that believers have a responsibility to evangelize as individuals and as a unified body of faith. Jesus taught that believers have a responsibility to be co-witnesses with the Holy Spirit (15:25-26 cf. 16:8-11). In similar fashion, Paul taught that there should be no schism in the body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor 12:25-26).

### **Jesus Prays for Believer's Future Glorification (17:24-26)**

24 Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (17:24-26)

*Verse 24* – Jesus was going to the Father's house, heaven, the New Jerusalem that is described by John in Revelation 21:9-27. Jesus desired that all believers be allowed to view His resurrected glory bestowed upon Him by the Father. This is a reference to the Shekinah glory, to the glory of the Messiah with His dominion over the earth restored (Dan 7:13). With the exception of three men (Peter, James and John) on the Mount of the Transfiguration, Christ's glory had not been revealed to anyone while He was on earth. When one beholds the glory of the Son of God, one can only fall down in homage and worship.

*Verses 25-26* – Jesus is not saying that He just wants believers to experience God the Father's love. He wants them to be characterized by it. He wants them to be transformed by it so that they demonstrate it to the world. Only believers who have truly grasped the hopelessness of their spiritual plight in view of the Savior's work on their behalf can be transformed by God's love and in turn demonstrate that love. To the extent that any self-righteousness is present in the believer's life, then to that extent the believer will not be able to demonstrate the love of the Father. Self-righteousness and a spiritual comprehension and internalization of God's love into one's own spiritual fiber are mutually exclusive.

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<sup>4</sup> Gruenler, "John 17:20-26," *Interpretation*. 43:2 (April 1989): 178 quoted in Derickson and Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 293.