

'The Great High Priestly Prayer' Ch. 17 (Keswick Convention 1973)

by Eric J. Alexander

Jesus' prayer in John 17 shows his concern for the glory of the Father and the well-being of his disciples, and it reveals the significance of the glory of God being shared with the Father and revealed in the church.

Duration: 1:00:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 17:6-19

Topics: "Disciples"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on three key elements for the well-being of disciples in the world: perseverance, separation, and consecration. He emphasizes the importance of believers persevering in their faith and not being swayed by the ways of the world. The preacher also highlights the love and giving within the Godhead, with the Father presenting believers as a love gift to the Son, and the Son giving eternal life and knowledge of God to believers. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the significance of Jesus' work on the cross, where the glory of God is fully displayed, and how this is central to the book of Revelation.

Transcript

We turn this morning to John chapter 17, which Bishop Ryle has called the most remarkable chapter in the Bible, adding with great wisdom, we have no line with which to fathom its depths. Shortly before his death, Philip Melancthon, Martin Luther's colleague, lectured on the 17th chapter of John and said, there is no voice which has ever been heard either in heaven or in earth like this prayer offered up by the Son of God himself. And there is no question that one can scarcely read this chapter as I'm sure you've been finding as you've been, as the general says, doing your homework before this morning.

It's almost impossible to read it without a great sense of the wonder and awe that comes through words like these. And as we study it, we shall inevitably discover that we are indeed out of our depth here. We have no line with which to fathom it.

However, we shall turn together to the 17th chapter of John to have, as it were, a scratch on the surface. The Lord Jesus has finished his discourse to the disciples and now turns from instruction to intercession, thereby, as John Calvin points out, giving a great example to ministers of the word that it is by watering the good seed with prayer that power and thrust comes to the word of the living God. And this is what our Lord

does.

He turns from instruction to intercession. It has been customary to call this prayer the great high priestly prayer of Jesus, and it is certainly helpful and illuminating for us to see our Lord here in the role of the great high priest. That is a theme which is, of course, so fully and gloriously worked out in the epistle to the Hebrews.

He is distinguished from all other priests in that he is both priest and sacrifice. He is both the offerer and the victim, and he is about to bear the sins of his people in his own body as the sacrificial victim. And now before he comes to the place where this is to be done, he bears the needs of his people before the Father as the great high priest and mediator.

The nature of this prayer, therefore, takes on the two activities of the great high priest. It is both consecration, Jesus says, I consecrate myself, and it is intercession. He is consecrating himself to be our sin bearer, and he is lovingly interceding for us as our mediator.

Now before we come to the detail of the chapter, Bishop Ryle draws attention to one great value of this prayer which it seems to me very vital not to neglect. He says it is wonderful, this prayer of our Lord, as a pattern of the intercession which the Son, as a high priest, is ever carrying on for us in heaven. And I've no doubt that this is one of the great blessings we ought to derive from this prayer and from studying it together.

We don't think nearly enough of our Lord's present intercessory ministry. We concentrate a great deal on his finished work, his past ministry, and on that work which is still to be consummated by his glorious return in person and in power. But there is a work which our Lord Jesus Christ is doing now, beloved, for his people.

He is making intercession for us, and our salvation in the present tense is closely knit with this. How is it that he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by him? It is because he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Now that's what this prayer is a pattern of in many ways.

What is this intercessory ministry which is patterned here? Well, do you remember how the high priest's ministry in Exodus chapter 28 is symbolized for us, and the ministry of our Lord is symbolized here in Exodus 28, in the rather strange clothing that Aaron was prescribed to wear, whereby he had a shoulder piece with the names of the people of Israel engraved on two stones and put on his shoulders. Do you remember? And then he had a breastplate on which again the names of the people of Israel were engraved on stones and embedded into this breastplate, and he was to bear the names of the people of God before God on his shoulders and on his heart. Now you see the symbolism.

This is God's picture book. This is God's visual aid as it were, and the people of God were to be upheld before God by name, by their names indelibly written in stone, and the names of the people of God are upheld before God, and they lie near to the heart of God. That's what this means, and we ought to lay hold of this blessed truth that this morning the names of every one of us as the Lord's people in this tent are engraved on the heart of God, and our concerns lie close to his heart.

Well now, the words with which the prayer begins in John 17, 1, Father, the hour has come, provide us with the real background to it. There, of course, a reference to the fact that Jesus is on the threshold of his suffering and passion. That phrase, the hour, or sometimes in John, my time, is the hour of his

consummation of his ministry, and it's a phrase that comes very frequently, but until now that phrase has always had not yet attached to it.

You get it beginning, for example, in John chapter 2. Do you remember in the story of the wedding at Cana when Jesus says to his mother, woman, what have I to do with the mine hour is not yet come, and all through John's gospel this not yet is added to the phrase mine hour, but here Jesus says the hour has come, and it's particularly impressive to notice how it is the Lord himself who declares the hour has come. He is, in other words, not harried to the cross when it suited men. He is striding, as it were, with a regal majesty to the cross, moving with the perfect timing of the God who is directing the whole universe on its course, and as he comes into the presence of the Father for his disciples, having in measured tones spoken to them about all that lies before both them and him, it is he who now declares the hour has come, and you see the whole world of men and devils, all the Pilates and Caiaphases, all the prevaricators, the Jews and the Romans, they all had to wait, as it were, on the wings of the scene of history until God came and said now, and this is the real background of this.

It's the picture of our Lord moving to the cross, which you get coming out in the language of the apostles in their prayer in Acts chapter 4, for instance, and they ask the Lord for the kind of poise in their own spirits which is in the heart of Jesus as he comes and says to the Father, the hour has come. You remember how they pray in Acts 4, truly in the city they're gathered together against thy holy child Jesus whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined to be done. Father, the hour has come, says Jesus.

He prays as the Son of God and as the King of Glory. Now, one cannot but feel that it's almost unseemly to analyze this prayer in the 17th chapter of John, but there are three areas in which the prayer of our Lord concentrates, conveniently set out, if you have the RSV, in three paragraphs, and the themes of these three sections are as follows. In the first section, verses 1 to 5, our Lord is focusing his prayer upon the glory of the Son and of the Father.

And in the second section, verses 6 to 19, his prayer is focused upon the well-being of the disciples in the world. And in the third section, verse 20 to the end, the prayer is focused on the unity of the future church, universal. The glory of the Son and the Father, the well-being of the disciples in the world, and the unity of future believers in the church universal.

Well, may we turn to the first of these sections, verses 1 to 5, the glory of the Son and the Father. It's sometimes said that Jesus is here praying for himself as he begins, Father, the hour has come, glorify thy Son. But that could be a misleading idea, I would suggest to you, as if there were some kind of self-seeking in our Lord's praying.

The burden on his heart on these first verses is the glory of the Godhead and the accomplishing of salvation. And this will be not by self-seeking, but by self-sacrifice. So we need to rid our minds of any idea of a self-seeking if we say our Lord is praying here for himself.

The petition that Jesus makes in these first verses concerns the glorifying of the Father and the Son. Twice he prays for his own glorification. In verse 1, Father the hour has come, glorify thy Son.

And again in verse 5, now Father glorify thou me in thine own presence. And twice he relates that prayer to the glorifying of the Father. Again in verse 1, glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee.

And in verse 4, I have glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do, and now glorify thou me. So there are these two concerns in the heart of our Lord. And there are two questions that we need to ask of these verses.

First, what is this glory of which Jesus speaks? Glorify thou me with the glory I had with thee before the world was. He wants the glory to be manifested, and that's the first question. What is this glory of which Jesus speaks? And the second question is, how is this glory manifested? Or how is the Father glorified in the Son? Well the first of these two questions, what is this glory of which Jesus speaks? The glory of God in Scripture is, of course, the outshining of his character.

It is the luster of what the Shorter Catechism calls, and I hope you have read the Shorter Catechism. It calls his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. And it is the outshining of these characteristics of God, which is his glory.

And Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3 tells us that Jesus is the brightness, the effulgence of this glory. So God is glorified when he is manifested, and when he is manifested in his Son, we read, the Word became flesh, and we beheld his glory, because the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus Christ. Now the second question, where is that glory of God to be seen? And particularly, how is the Father glorified in the Son? It's what is answered in these verses.

And there are five things that these verses have to teach us about this. And I take them as it were in historical order. Where is the glory of God of which Jesus here speaks to be seen? First, you will notice that the glory of God was shared by Jesus with the Father in eternity.

Verse 5, Now, Father, glorify thou me in thine own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made. Now that's really very striking, you see, because God specifically says in the Scripture that he will not share his glory with another. And yet the Lord Jesus says he shared it from all eternity.

Now, my friends, we cannot pretend to understand what this means, what this glory that Jesus shared with the Father before the foundation of the world was. Let me simply pause long enough to point this out to you. Could there be a clearer claim to deity in the Scripture than this? Can there be any remaining doubt in our minds of what the Lord Jesus Christ himself claimed in his position with the Father, in his nature? He shared the glory of the Father before the world was made.

I say again, we can't understand it what this is like. We are like kindergarten children in the university here. But Jesus shared this glory with the Father before the world was made.

Secondly, this glory was veiled in the flesh of Jesus in the world. Verse 4, I glorify thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do, so that the Lord Jesus has been manifesting this glory as he has come into the world and as he has done the work that the Father gave him to do. Now, that is, of course, what Jesus is speaking about when he tells, what John is speaking about when he tells us in John 1 14, we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father.

But, of course, that was a veiled glory. You will notice that our Lord does not divest himself of his glory when he comes into his flesh and is born in Bethlehem. He veiled his glory.

And Wesley is therefore right when he sings about veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. But in his flesh, our Lord manifested the glory of God in a veiled way. He does it in a veiled way because, of course, men in the world couldn't have stood it if the glory of God had not been veiled.

It would have been impossible for them to have looked upon him. And sometimes it seems as if that is almost beginning to happen and the veil is wearing very thin. You remember of the transfiguration, for example, when our Lord goes up the mountain and suddenly he is transfigured, he is metamorphosed before them.

And it seems as if the veil which is hiding his glory is becoming thin and they come before him and bow before him. He is shining with glory. You get it in some other places, too.

It's very significant, I believe, that when you see these men coming in the garden to take Jesus, do you remember? And they come and say, we are seeking Jesus of Nazareth when Jesus challenges them. Now they're facing him at this point. You see, they say, he says to them, whom seek ye? They say, we seek Jesus of Nazareth.

And he suddenly confronts them and he says, I am he. Now, do you remember what you read after that? They fell back. Why do you think these men fell back? Not with fear.

They were there with some soldiers to take him away. They fell back. Now I tell you why they fell back.

I think it was because when he declared himself, I am, something of the glory began to break through. But lustrous and blinding though that glory was to men, it was the glory of his humiliation and was pale compared to the light inaccessible, which was his in eternity. It was veiled in the flesh of Jesus in the world.

Thirdly, it was revealed in his saving work on the cross. This is supremely where Jesus is, where Jesus says the Father is to be glorified in the Son. The hour, you see, and the glory are welded together.

I have glorified thee on earth, having finished the work thou gavest me to do. What was that work? Well, that's the work that's described in verse two. It is the giving of eternal life to men and bringing them to know God.

Thou hast given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given to him. Where was that work finished and accomplished? It was finished and accomplished at the cross where Jesus cries in triumph, it is finished. Now the glory of God is revealed in the saving work of Christ, because nowhere is the character of God more fully displayed than in his cross and resurrection, where he displays his holiness, his justice, his love, his tender mercy towards the children of men.

Now this is why in the book of Revelation, that book of unveiling, you discover that in the center of the glory of heaven, what is it that's in the center of the glory of heaven? It is the figure of a lamb as it had been slain. Now that's where the glory of God is manifested. Says Calvin, as in a splendid theater, the glory of God is manifested in the cross of Jesus.

Fourthly, this glory is unveiled in his ascension into heaven. That is the point of the prayer in verse five, and now father glorify thou me in thine own presence with the glory I had with thee before the world was made. This is a prayer for our Lord's entering again into that same glory, which he shared with the father before the world began.

And yet, in a sense, if you think carefully, it's not entirely the same glory. For when the Lord Jesus ascends into heaven, it is now as the God-man. And it is as the God-man that the Lord Jesus is glorified in his ascension, so that not only his deity, but his manhood is vested with the glory of God.

And that means that Christ is our forerunner entered into the glory to bring us to glory. It's Christ's ascension into the glory, which as the God-man, you see, which gives us the hope of glory. And he is engaged in this work now, in his ascended might and triumph with his finished work, bringing many sons unto glory.

And we have that glorious hope of the end day for the children of God, which is not the immortality of the soul. That's not the Christian hope. The Christian hope is the resurrection of the body.

And a glorified body is possible because the Lord Jesus has had his manhood, as well as his divinity, clothed and vested with glory. Well, that leads us to the last of these five places where the Son glorifies the Father. It is shared with the Father in eternity.

It is veiled in the flesh of Jesus. It is revealed in his saving work. It is unveiled in his ascension into heaven.

Could anything be more wonderful than that? Ah, but beloved, there is something still more. If you look at verse 10, if we may intrude into the second part of the prayer. For you notice that now in the meanwhile there is another place where this glory is to be seen.

All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. That's what the work of grace should do, you see. It should bring the glory of God into the life of the believer.

There is coming a day when we shall behold his glory, but in this day Jesus says, I am glorified in them. That is the burden of our Lord for the glory of the Father and the Son. Will you turn with me now to the second section of the prayer, the well-being of the disciples in the world.

Verse 9, our Lord points to the constituency for which he is now praying. In this section I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine.

First will you notice the description that Jesus gives of these men to whom he has revealed the Father, and he spends some considerable time describing them. This is very wonderful. They are first of all the Father's possession.

In verse 6, I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world, thine they were. In verse 9, I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine.

And believers are described by our Lord as the Father's possession. They belong to thee. Now they are not only the Father's possession, but in the second place they are the Father's love gift to the Son.

Do you see that? In verse 2, for example, since thou hast given him power over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. Verse 6, I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world. Verse 9, I am praying for them.

I'm not praying for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me. And again in verse 24, Father I desire that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am. Now have you noticed, I wonder, this very remarkable series of givings which there are in John's gospel.

First of all, the Son is the Father's love gift to the world. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for the world. Secondly, believers are the Father's love gift to the Son.

Thine they were, thou gavest them me. Now do you grasp what this means? Can you think of this? It is the picture, you see, of the Son. It's the picture of the Lord Jesus being given his bride by the Father.

Thine they were, thou hast given them me. And believers are the Father's love gift to the Son. Do you know that gorgeous little picture you have in the Church of England wedding service, where the wedding begins, I think it is, with the minister saying to the assembled company, as if he didn't already know, who giveth this woman to be married to this man? And the Father, with varying degrees of reluctance or willingness, says, I do.

And there he leads the bride. And you notice what happens. He brings the bride up and he presents her.

The Father comes with the bride, you see, to the bridegroom. Now it's a glorious picture because she belongs to him. But he comes and this is how the bridegroom gets his bride.

And it is a blessed picture. I think we ought to incorporate it into the Church of Scotland. But it's a glorious picture he has.

The bridegroom gets his bride because the Father comes and he takes this most precious gift of his and he presents it to him. And he says, there you are. Now, beloved, that's how Christ gets his bride.

That's how the Lord Jesus gets his bride, which is the church the Father takes you. You who belong to the Father whom he has chosen out of the world, he takes you. And, oh God, this humbles us down into the dust.

He takes you and he presents you to the Lord Jesus. And he says, there is my love gift. I cannot fathom that.

Can you? That's something that sent me into an absolute bewilderment of heart and mind. But it's what the Holy Scripture tells us. It's what the Lord Jesus says.

He has gained his bride because the Father has come and taken the believer and presented us to the Son. But you notice further, what about the Son's love gift to the believer? Oh, the giving there is in the whole of the Godhead and in the family. That's why the essence of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts is giving, not getting, but giving, you see, because it's the very fiber that seems to be making the Godhead what it is.

What's the Son's love gift to the believer? Well, in verse 2, it's eternal life and the knowledge of God since thou has given him power over all flesh to give eternal life to all thou has given him. And it's the Father's name. Do you notice in verse 6, I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world.

He has shown them all the glory of the Father's character, you see. And then in verse 8, it's the Father's word that he gives to them. I have given them the words which thou gavest me.

You can't get away from this, you see. The Father has given the bride to the Son. He has given the word to the Son.

And the Son has given the bride and he gives eternal life to them. And he gives the Father's name to them. And then the Father gives him the word and he gives the word to the believer.

Oh, the giving, the blessed, blessed donations that there are from the heart of God to us. But what about the believer's love gift to the Father and to the Son? Verse 6, thine they were thou has given them me and they have kept thy word and verse 8, I have given them the words which thou gavest me and they have received them and knowing truth that I came from thee, believe that thou didst send me. What is it that we can give? God knows there is so little we have to give, is there not? But what we give to him is our obedience.

They have kept my word and our faith. They have believed. Now having described them, Jesus goes on to pray for them.

And his prayer is, of course, supremely a prayer for their sanctification or holiness. And the central theme is pointed up in verse 17. Sanctify them in the truth.

Thy word is truth as thou didst send me into the world, so have I sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in the truth. Now let me simply use the time we have to point out to you what seem to me to be the three main elements in the sanctification for which Jesus prays in these verses. Sanctification, of course, just means to make holy.

And the three elements that I see in these verses in our love for the well-being of the disciples in the world are first perseverance, father keep them, and then separation, they are not of the world. If they were of the world, the world would love its own, but they are not of the world. Thirdly, consecration, verse 19, that they also may be consecrated in the truth.

Well now, first perseverance, and we are really scratching at this, aren't we? Do you know that my dear brother Jervis Angel, who is sharing in the young people's meetings, is going to be doing John 17 in the young people's meetings this morning, so that if you find that I haven't dealt with some of these things, you could just nip around to stand outside the young people's tent afterwards, and you could listen in to Mr. Angel, and you might well find that angels tread. I was going to say where Alexanders only can rush in. Let's look then at perseverance.

Verse 11, 12, and 15, Jesus speaks of the need of the disciples to be kept, and now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I'm coming to thee, holy father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one. I have kept them, while I was with them. They needed kept, you see.

I kept them in thy name which thou hast given me. I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled. He was not one of them.

He was not of them. He didn't belong to the vine, but those whom thou hast given me, I have guarded them and kept them, he says. And then again in verse 15, I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.

Now beloved, it's a very wonderful thing to me that our Lord not only prays for the disciples in this connection, father, keep them, but he actually lets them hear him pray for their security. Now do you see why he does that? He's praying aloud. That's of course why we have the prayer of John 17, and he prays for them because the Lord is not just concerned about your security, he's concerned about your serenity, and he lets them hear him pray, father, keep them.

He does the same thing for Simon Peter. Of course you remember Simon, Simon, he says, Satan has desired to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you. I have prayed for you.

That's why it's a very important thing not just to pray for people, but to tell them that you're praying for them. I think the Lord means us to do that. If it's true, if it's true, I tremble when I think of the number of people who have promised and covenanted to missionaries, we'll pray for you, and they do for a week, but if it's true, we need to tell one another as the Lord told Peter, and as he here told his disciples, or allowed them to hear, I will pray for you.

Now do you see from this the quite vital truth which derives from our Lord's prayer and his burden for the disciples of what the perseverance of the believer depends on? What is it that the perseverance of the believer depends on? How can you be sure that you will endure to the end, that you will be kept and guarded from the world, the flesh, and the devil? Well, the answer is it's in the keeping power of God. That's what it depends on. Now you see, I think the Lord may have particularly been ministering to Simon Peter's need in this connection, for Peter had quite the wrong idea about perseverance.

In chapter 13, verse 37, you remember, he says, Lord, I will lay down my life for you. He says, you're a bit disturbed about what's going to happen to the disciples, he said, and you're talking about us being scattered. He says, don't have any fear, Lord, you can count on me.

I'm the persevering variety. Oh, how little a man knew his own heart and name. But you see, perseverance in the Christian life is not, Lord, you can count on me, but, Lord, there is nothing else in the world that I can count on but that you are able to keep that which I have committed unto you.

It's Paul's testimony in Philippians 3.3, we glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. That's why Jesus prays in verse 11, Father, Holy Father. Now do you notice he is appealing to the Lord's fatherly grace, to that fatherly grace which will not deny his child any good thing, to the holiness in the Father's character, that is to everything that God is by nature.

And he says, Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou has given me. And it's not now, I believe, the disciples that Jesus is referring to when he says, thou has given me, but the name of the Father. Now do you see what this means? The Father has given his name to the Son, that is his nature, and the Lord Jesus has manifested all the nature of God.

And this is why they wanted him to stay, you see. They wanted to know the security of the Lord Jesus. They had known his shepherdly care in their lives.

They had known his hand stretched out when in their folly they would have run ahead of him in the energy of the flesh. They had known his hand behind him when through lack of faith they would have lagged back from him. And they knew something of the glorious keeping power of the Lord Jesus.

Ah, but he says, that was the name of the Father that he gave to me. And now he says, Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou has given me. I have guarded them when I was in the world, but now I come to thee.

Keep them. And the name of God is the character of God, and our security lies in that. We had our prayer conference in May at Mabledon in Kent, a lovely house in the Kent countryside.

And there there is a great high tower in the house, and carved on that great tower are the words, The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is saved. That's the perseverance of the believer.

And our perseverance depends upon this, upon what God is and what God does. I have kept them, I have guarded them. Father, he says, keep them.

You know some of the great hymns have got this quite wonderfully. Top Lady has it right in his great hymn, A debtor to mercy alone. Do you know that hymn? In the last verse he is the line, Yea, I to the end shall endure.

Now why is he so sure? Some people tell me that sounds a bit cocky to me, that you know, I to the end shall endure. Shades of Simon Peter. Well, Top Lady gives us the answer in these words.

Listen to them. The work which his goodness began, the arm of his strength will complete. His promise is yea and amen and never was forfeited yet.

Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below or above, can make him his purpose forego or sever my soul from his love. My name from the palms of his hands eternity will not erase. Impressed on his heart it remains in marks of indelible grace.

Yea, I to the end shall endure, as sure as the earnest is given. More happy but not more secure the glorified spirits in heaven. Now specifically Jesus prays for their perseverance in the face of all the pressure and power of the evil one.

In verse 15, I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil one. Not in the absence you will notice of all the pressures that they are to face, but in the face of them. You remember the psalmist's great testimony, thou preparest a table in the presence of mine enemies.

Well there is their perseverance and secondly their separation. The whole thought of sanctification and holiness in the scripture and Jesus great theme here as I believe is sanctify them in thy truth. The theme of sanctification and holiness in the scripture is rooted in the idea of separation and linguistically that is what the word really means.

So in verse 6 the disciples are those thou gavest me out of the world and this is the negative side of that separation. But it's a very important thing to see that there are two sides to the separation of which the scripture speaks. Thou has given them me out of the world and we are in this sense separated, translated out of one kingdom into another.

We are cut off as it were from all that for God and that's the second element in the separation. It's a positive element. We are separated unto the gospel.

We are separated from the world, from sin and the evil one unto the Lord Jesus Christ. But here it's specifically their separation from the world that Jesus is speaking about. The word world occurs 19 times in this chapter if you take the trouble to count and it's obvious that the disciples relation to it is a crucial factor in our Lord's intercession for them.

And this doctrine of separation sanctify them. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Thou has given them me out of the world.

This doctrine of separation is one which we eclipse or neglect at our great peril because there is to be a distinctiveness about the believer's life which is a reflection of the distinctiveness of the life of Jesus. They

are not of the world even as I am not of the world and that is the real distinctiveness of the believer. Now beloved you will notice that our distinctiveness is not a matter of being odd or peculiar.

There are many people who delight in being in the worst possible sense of the term the Lord's peculiar people and they think that this is what it means to be separated from the world. You know one of the first Christian meetings that I was ever taken to was in a hall in the north side of Glasgow and they took me to this meeting. I suppose I was in my late teens at the time and people were seeking to interest me and help me and they took me to this hall.

And you know I will never forget it's by the grace of God alone that it didn't put me off forever. It was entitled over on top of the door I don't know whether it still stands in Bishop Briggs in Glasgow still the odd fellows hall. Now I discovered later on that the odd fellows were a group of people some kind of society that came from the Victorian era but you know well sometimes it's a great error for us to imagine that being separate from the world makes you an oddity.

You know about the little girl who prayed one night when her mummy and daddy were listening Lord please make all the bad people good and her mummy and daddy said what a lovely prayer. And then she added and please make the good people nice. Well Paul's word is the same as the Lord Jesus.

Be not conformed to this world and what he means is this beloved when the Lord God has called you to himself out of the world he has called you into something infinitely greater. He doesn't want you to live like a pauper anymore now that he has called you to be a royal priesthood. He doesn't want you to live at that kind of level anymore.

He doesn't want you to live by the standards of the world. He doesn't want you to live by the criteria of the world. I say to you young people who are here in Keswick this week are you living your life and planning your future and ordering your priorities by the priorities of the world and the standards of the world and the things that are okay there by the lifestyle of the world or by the lifestyle of the New Testament.

That's the separation of the believer and it's infinitely more costly than some of the rather trivial things that we concentrate on when we speak about separation. You are to be a distinctive people. Now that neither implies isolation from the world.

I do not pray take them out of the world nor does it imply insulation from reality. Jesus says keep them from the evil one. This will be all around them and God knows in these days there are subtle hidden persuasive pressures to bring people into conformity.

But neither through isolation nor through insulation says Jesus do I want them to be kept. It's through transformation in their character. Positively the separation has two things.

It is a spirit of detachment from the world which gives evidence that they are here as strangers and pilgrims. And it is secondly a spirit of missionary compassion for the world. Verse 18 as thou did send me into the world so have I sent them into the world.

And that is the burden that our Lord prays may be on the hearts of his children. Thirdly not only perseverance and separation but consecration. There is another meaning given in verse 19 of this word translated sanctify in verse 17.

It is actually the same word and that's why you'll find that the authorized version I think translates it the same way. Sanctify them in the truth thy word is truth verse 17. Then for their sakes I sanctify myself that they also may be sanctified in the truth.

But this other translation is a very proper and right one. There are two things to say about it. First of all it is very clear that the means that God employs for this inward work of sanctification which is called consecration is his word.

Sanctify them in the truth thy word is truth. Now I couldn't do better than read to you the words of Bishop Rylamus. The word he says is the great instrument by which the Holy Ghost carries forward the inward work of sanctification.

By bringing that word to bear more forcibly upon mind and will and conscience and affection he makes the character grow more holy. Here lies the immense importance of regularly reading the written word and hearing the preached word. Believers who neglect the word will not grow in holiness.

The means God employs for this inward work of consecration is his word. But also you will notice this is the aim that Jesus has in view in his consecration of himself to suffering and death. His aim is our consecration.

Now you notice this in verse 19. In verse 18 he says as thou did send me into the world so have I sent them into the world and for their sake I consecrate myself. That is a mode of speech by which he is referring to his consecrating of himself to his death and suffering as the vicarious atonement for the sins of his people.

He is consecrating himself to be the sin bearer. Now why is he giving himself to this agony and this sin bearing? Well says Jesus it is that they also may be consecrated in truth. Now I'm sure that that is some reference to their being sent out into the world but it is a reference even more primary and fundamental than the sending of the believer out into the world.

The great motive of our Lord in consecrating himself to his saving work was to create in us a likeness to his consecration to the Father. That's why we have been reading more than once and studying here this week 2 Corinthians 5. He died for all that they who live should live no longer unto themselves but unto him. Now this is why Jesus says to the disciples that they are to take up the cross.

You see the cross is not only the instrument of our regeneration and justification. The cross is the instrument of our sanctification and the aim by which our with which our Lord goes to the cross is that they may be consecrated. Listen to these words of Samuel Chadwick.

Do you know Samuel Chadwick? Samuel Chadwick. As the Son of God placed all the resources of his glory at the disposal of man's need so every disciple abandons all to God for the blessing of man. The Christian undertakes to be as Christ in the world to do his work to minister in his spirit and for this he lays all at the feet of his Lord and this is what it is to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

Thus does our Lord pray for the well-being of his disciples in the world. Now finally and it having prayed for the glory of the Godhead and especially the glorifying of the Father in the Son and then for the sanctification of the believers whom he had been given by the Father their perseverance their consecration and did you remember the other one? Good, their separation. He now turns to pray for the future believers in the church universal.

This third section is a section in which the Lord Jesus Christ lifts up his eyes and looks over the centuries to future believers and his gaze stretches right over the centuries. Do you grasp this my Christian brothers and sisters to focus on us this morning? He has the whole church of God in view and his gaze is upon us this morning and he is speaking of people like ourselves. He encompasses that multitude that no man can number now in his asking.

There are two distinct sets of people mentioned you will notice and it's a kind of bridge from verse 20. They are described in verse 20 in the Revised Standard Version as these, I do not pray for these only, and those but also for those who are to believe in me through their word. These are the apostles those for whom he has been praying in 6 to 19 and those are future believers and the these and those become the all who are one in verse 21 that they may all be one even as thou father art in me and I in thee and the bridge between these and those is the word of truth which they have believed.

That word you will notice has a long history traced in John's gospel it is given by the father to the son it is given by the son to the apostles and then do you notice this bridge it is given by the apostles to future believers so that the link we have with the apostles the real apostolic succession in other words is the truth which the apostles were given by Jesus which Jesus had received from the father and which the apostles give to future generations in the word inscripturated in the new testament now that's the great link you see and it's this word through which we believe that is the unifying factor that's what unites us with the apostles and that's what unites us with each other that's what makes us all one in Christ Jesus both those and these have received and believed the word of

truth and that's what makes them one now this means you see that the unity for which our lord is here praying is not just a unity of spirit that's a very important distinction there are several words that are misunderstood and misinterpreted in connection with christian unity words like union and unity and unanimity and uniformity well now here it is unanimity in gospel truth which gives us true unity in christ we must never be afraid of this beloved because it's one of the central elements in the new testament's teaching about unity unanimity in gospel truth is the essence of gospel unity and this unity you will notice is patterned in verses 11 21 and 22 upon the unity within the godhead verse 11 that they may be one even as we are one the end of verse 11 verse 21 even as thou art in me

and i in thee that they may be in us verse 22 the glory thou has given me i have given them that they may be one as we are this implies for us this unity patterned upon the unity between the father and the son and it's this that our lord is praying for it implies for us in the words of milton and milligan all wills bowing in the same direction now you think of this what is it that provides a real unity of heart and life in a fellowship all wills bowing in the same direction all affections burning with the same flame all aims directed to the same end a unity of heart and mind and will that's the blessed thing about being here isn't it it doesn't matter toughens what kind of denomination you belong to i was going to say abomination i mean denomination it doesn't matter what denomination i

couldn't tell you offhand sometimes what denominations my brothers belong to because the thing that unites us is this it's a unanimity in gospel truth it's our wills bowing in the same direction our affections burning with the same flame our aims directed to the same end a unity of heart and mind and will but you note that the ultimate concern of our lord is a burden for a lost world verses 25 and 26 oh righteous father the world has not known thee but i have known thee and these have known that thou hast sent me i made known to them thy name and i will make it known that the love which thou hast loved me with which thou hast loved me may be in them and i in them the world does not know me but they have known me and

jesus longs that the apostles may go out and that the world may know

praise him for the touch of his hand upon our lives do we not oh that's something that would send you into rhapsodies of worship but glorious as that may be we still press toward the waiting for the second touch and that will be joy unspeakable and full of glory

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