

“THE CHURCH’S ONE FOUNDATION”

I. Introduction

- A. At this point in John’s Gospel, Jesus has just finished his Farewell Discourse to his disciples, which could very well be regarded as the greatest sermon ever preached.
1. Here in John 17, we see that Jesus followed that sermon with what could be called the greatest prayer ever prayed.
 2. It is certainly one of the great passages in all of Scripture.
 3. The Scottish Reformer John Knox said that it was this passage that made him a Christian.
 4. As you can see by the heading in the ESV, John 17 has come to be known as Jesus’ high priestly prayer.
 5. It is an apt title, because Jesus is interceding with God on behalf of his people.
 6. This is Jesus’ prayer for his disciples and for all who will believe in him through their apostolic message.
 7. In other words, this is Jesus’ prayer for you and for me.
- B. One of the things that makes John 17 unique is that, like the psalms, it is both a prayer *to* God and a revelation *from* God.
1. As Augustine explained, “The prayer that Christ made for us, He has also made known to us. Being so great a Master, not only what He says in discoursing to the disciples but also what He says to the Father in prayer for them is for their edification.”
 2. As we study Jesus’ high priestly prayer over the next few weeks, we will see that it teaches us a number of things about Christ and his church.

3. Today, we will focus upon the theme that stands out in the first eight verses: Christ is the one foundation upon which the church is built.
4. And as we consider this, we will see that these verses show us that Jesus is the church's one foundation because he is God in the flesh, because he is the source of our election, and because he is the only way to God.

II. Jesus Is God in the Flesh

- A. Jesus begins his high priestly prayer by saying that "the hour has come."
 1. The term "hour" is used throughout John's Gospel to refer to the appointed time for Jesus' death.
 2. It was noted at several earlier points in this Gospel that Jesus' hour had not yet come, but now it is at hand.
 3. Jesus knows that it is time for him to complete the work that he was sent into the world to accomplish.
 4. In light of this, he prays that the Father would glorify him.
 5. The fact that Jesus would be so bold as to make such a request of God testifies to his divine identity.
 6. God does not share his glory with any of his creatures.
 7. As he says in Isaiah 48:11, "My glory I will not give to another."
 8. The reason why Jesus could ask God to glorify him is because he is the eternal Son of God.
- B. This point is made even more clear by what Jesus says in verse 5.

1. He says that he existed in a state of glory with the Father before the world was made.
 2. From all eternity, Jesus lived in communion with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.
 3. When he took on our flesh at his incarnation, he allowed the glory of his divine nature to be hidden under his human nature.
 4. This explains why people did not recognize his deity while he was on the earth.
 5. But now that Jesus is about to complete the work for which he was sent into the world, he can ask the Father to clothe him with glory once again.
- C. In light of the fact that Jesus is fully God, we might wonder what he means when he says that the Father has “given him authority over all flesh.”
1. If Jesus is God, then he has always had this authority.
 2. How can he say that the Father gave it to him?
 3. To make sense of this, we need to understand the theological distinction between Jesus’ *essential* dominion as the Second Person of the Trinity and his *mediatorial* dominion as the Messiah.
 4. As far as his essential dominion is concerned, Jesus possesses all authority in and of himself because he is God.
 5. But when it comes to his mediatorial dominion, authority is given to him in his office as the God-man, the one true Mediator between God and his people.
 6. It is this second kind of dominion, his mediatorial dominion, that Jesus is talking about in verse 2 of our passage.

- D. While Christ's mediatorial rule extends over "all flesh," verse 2 makes it clear that he only gives the gift of eternal life to the elect.
1. Jesus rules over all, but at present his rule is only seen in his church.
 2. This is consistent with the teaching that is found elsewhere in the New Testament on this subject.
 3. Jesus says at the end of Matthew's Gospel that he has been given "all authority in heaven and on earth." (Mt. 28:18)
 4. At the same time, the author of Hebrews reminds us that "we do not yet see everything in subjection to [Jesus]." (Heb. 2:8)
 5. Paul tells us that when Christ returns in glory, every knee will bow before him and every tongue will confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (see Phil. 2:11)
 6. But until that day, Jesus is exercising his mediatorial dominion through the ministry that he has established in his church.
 7. He is subduing his people to himself through the church's work of making disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and teaching them to observe everything that Jesus commanded.
- E. One other way in which these verses testify to Jesus' divine identity is seen in Jesus' statement that he manifested God's name to his people.
1. To manifest God's name is to reveal God's essential nature.
 2. Jesus could do this because he is God in human flesh.
 3. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Col. 1:15)

4. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." (Heb. 1:3)
- F. It makes all the difference in the world that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.
1. Our hope of salvation rests upon the fact that we have a Savior who shares our nature and has the power to save us.
 2. As J.C. Ryle puts it, "He to whom we are commanded to flee for pardon, and in whom we are bid to rest for peace, is God as well as man. To all who really think about their souls, and are not careless and worldly, the thought is full of comfort. Such people know and feel that great sinners need a great Savior, and that no mere human redeemer would meet their needs. Then let them rejoice in Christ, and lean back confidently on Him. Christ has all power, and is able to save to the uttermost, because Christ is divine."

III. Jesus Is the Source of Our Election

- A. This brings us to our second sermon point: Jesus is the church's one foundation is because he is the source of our election.
1. This point is made by Jesus' repeated use of phrases like "the people whom you gave me" to refer to the church.
 2. This phrase, or something like it, appears seven times in this prayer, and it was used at several earlier points in John's Gospel.
 3. While the terms 'election' and 'predestination' are not used here, this is clearly what Jesus is talking about when he says that he gives eternal life to those whom the Father has given to him.
- B. God the Father's giving of the elect to God the Son is something that we refer to in Reformed theology as the covenant of redemption.

1. This covenant was made between the members of the Godhead before the beginning of time.
 2. In the covenant of redemption, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit covenanted with one another to bring about the salvation of the elect.
 3. The Father graciously chose a people who would be saved, the Son agreed to do what was necessary to secure their salvation, and the Spirit agreed to apply this salvation to their lives.
 4. This is what Jesus is talking about in verse 4 when he says that he accomplished the work that the Father gave him to do.
 5. He is referring to the work that he agreed to carry out in the covenant of redemption.
- C. Notice that in verse 6, Jesus says “Yours they were.”
1. This shows us that the elect have always belonged to God.
 2. Before you trusted in Christ, before you were born, before the world was made, God counted you as his own.
 3. This underscores the fact that it is not anything that we do that causes us to become God’s people.
 4. It is entirely due to God’s grace.
- D. The disciples did not believe in Jesus because they were better than the rest of the world.
1. On the contrary, God gave them to Jesus “out of the world.”
 2. Though they didn’t do anything to deserve it, God appointed them to eternal life.

3. The disciples believed in Jesus because they were of the elect.
 4. The same is true for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ.
 5. As Jesus said back in chapter 6, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (v. 37)
 6. There is immense comfort for us in this.
 7. It tells us that we do not have to try to figure out if we are among those whom the Father gave to the Son in eternity past.
 8. As the Puritan pastor Matthew Poole explains, "We need not ascend up to heaven to search the rolls of the eternal counsels. All whom the Father has given to Christ shall come to Christ, and not only receive Him as Priest, but give themselves up to be ruled and quickened by Him. By such a receiving of Christ, we shall know whether we are of the number of those that are given to Christ."
 9. If you have come to Christ in faith, then you can be assured that you are numbered among the elect.
- E. We might wonder why Jesus describes the disciples in verse 6 as those who "kept" God's Word.
1. It is certainly no mystery that their faith was quite weak at this point.
 2. Jesus pointed out at the end of the previous chapter that they were about to abandon him.
 3. Nevertheless, he could say that they kept God's Word because he saw their faith.
 4. He knew that, while many others had left him for good, these men had truly believed the gospel.

5. Here again is J.C. Ryle: “Jesus sees far more in His believing people than they see in themselves, or than others see in them. The least degree of faith is very precious in His sight.”
6. Any Christian who takes an honest look at himself or herself will see all sorts of defects and infirmities and failures.
7. But if Jesus did not despise the disciples because of their feebleness, he will not despise us either.
8. He bears with us and saves us to the end, even though our faith is often so weak.

IV. Jesus Is the Only Way to God

- A. A third reason that this passage gives for why Jesus is the church’s one foundation is the fact that he is the only way to God.
 1. This is another prominent theme in John’s Gospel.
 2. It is most famously stated in John 14:6, where Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
 3. We see this truth expressed in our passage in verse 3, where Jesus defines eternal life as a matter of knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ.
 4. This statement exposes the error in what many people imagine heaven will be like.
 5. We often hear people saying that their deceased loved ones are now able to enjoy all of the hobbies and interests that they had on earth to their fullest extent in heaven.
 6. But according to Jesus, eternal life is not a paradise of our own imagining.
 7. It is a matter of being in fellowship with the one true God.

8. A person who never enjoyed fellowship with God in this life will certainly not find anything to enjoy about it in the world to come.
- B. Jesus makes it clear that this knowledge of the one true God can only be found through him.
1. The reason why this is the case is because God has supremely revealed himself in Christ and because God has provided the only way of salvation in Christ.
 2. Eternal life was made manifest in Jesus.
 3. In his first epistle, John even describes Jesus as “the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.” (1:2)
 4. There is no other way to God except through faith in Jesus Christ.
 5. This is why Martin Luther said that “If we seek God outside of Jesus we find only the devil.”
- C. It is important to understand that knowing God is not just a matter of intellectual knowledge.
1. It is not even a matter of agreeing that Christianity is true.
 2. Knowledge and assent are necessary elements of faith, but they are not sufficient in themselves to unite us to Christ.
 3. A third element is needed.
 4. We also have to place our personal trust in Jesus.
 5. You cannot be saved unless you are able to join the apostle Paul in saying, “the Son of God... loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.” (Gal. 2:20)

- D. That being said, we should take note of the way in which Jesus describes the disciples' faith in verse 8.
1. Faith is not a matter of having warm feelings about Jesus.
 2. Jesus says that the disciples received the "words" that he gave them.
 3. This term "words" is used repeatedly in John's Gospel to describe Jesus' teaching about God.
 4. It carries the same sense as the term 'doctrine.'
 5. This tells us that doctrine plays a vital role in the Christian life.
- E. This is an important point for us to grasp, because we are living in an age in which many Christians have little time for doctrine.
1. Christianity is touted as a way of life or as a personal relationship with God.
 2. While there is some truth in such assertions, they are inadequate definitions of what it means to be a Christian.
 3. Verse 8 makes it clear that the only way we can come to know God is by receiving the sound doctrine that is revealed in Christ.
 4. Never lose sight of the fact that the Christian faith is founded upon a message, a message that sets forth certain facts.
 5. Whenever this is disregarded or downplayed, people inevitably wander off into error and heresy.

V. Conclusion

- A. Have you received the doctrine that Jesus has set forth in his Word?

1. Do you believe that these things have been given to him by God?
2. Do you believe that he was sent into the world to do the work that God gave him to do, the work of saving his elect?
3. Do you believe that eternal life is a matter of knowing the one true God through Jesus Christ?
4. Do you trust in Christ alone for your salvation?

B. If you can answer 'yes' to these questions, then you can be assured that the work that Jesus came to accomplish was for the sake of your salvation.

1. You can take comfort in the fact that you are one of those whom the Father gave to the Son before time began.
2. You can read this prayer knowing that it is Jesus' prayer for you.
3. And you can know that your Lord and Savior continues to pray for you right now, even as he is seated in glory at the right hand of God in the heavenly Holy of holies.