

The Gospel of John (101): Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer (2)

Introduction:

Last Lord's Day we began to consider this prayer of our Lord Jesus to His Father in heaven. Here our Lord interceded as the High Priest on behalf of His people. He represented His people before His Father, those who were chosen (elected) by the Father in eternity and whom the Father had given to Him as His people. This prayer, which encompasses all of John 17, may be understood as having three major divisions, which we provided for us last week. Here they are again:

1. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5)
2. Jesus prays for His apostles (17:6-19)
3. Jesus prays for all true believers (17:20-26)

Last week we had cited a work of **John Bunyan** (1628-1688) who wrote a book on this subject, entitled, *The Intercession of Christ*. Jesus Christ serves His people before the presence of His Father requesting four aspects of their salvation. These include the following petitions He offers His Father on behalf of His people. Jesus Christ...

1. Prays that all the elect may be brought home to Him, that is, to God.
2. Prays that their sins committed after conversion may be forgiven them.
3. Prays that their graces, which they receive at conversion, may be maintained and supplied.
4. Prays that their persons may be preserved to His heavenly kingdom.¹

We began to address the first five verses of this chapter last week, today we will complete our consideration of these verses before we move on with the second division of this prayer which commences with verse 6 and continues through verse 19. Let us read these verses, but we will begin again with verse 1 in order to maintain the context of our Lord's words. Here is **John 17:1-19**.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

⁶"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. ⁸For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

⁹"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ¹²While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the

¹ John Bunyan, *The Intercession of Christ* (Christian Focus Publications, n.d.), p. 19.

world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

In verses 1 through 5 we read that our Lord Jesus had prayed first for Himself before having prayed on behalf of His people. He requested that His Father would grant Him sovereign authority over all humanity so that He might glorify His Father to them and through them. But Jesus also desired to have sovereign authority over all humanity (“flesh”) so that He could bring salvation to His people, the ones the Father had chosen in eternity to give to His Son as their possession. Before we move on to verses 6 and following, I would like us to consider more carefully and clearly our Lord’s statement of verses 3ff. Here we read that...

B. Jesus defined and described the true nature and essence of eternal life (v. 3).

Jesus had prayed, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³***And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.***” Eternal life is not merely a temporal matter, an unending existence. Eternal life is a quality of existence, one in which the people of God have come to know and enjoy fully the true nature and presence of God.

Otherwise put, the glorification of the Son entails the glorification of God (v. 1) – i.e. God is clothed in splendour in the eyes of those who perceive what has been achieved by God Himself on the cross, resurrection and exaltation of His Son. To see God’s glory, to be given eternal life – these are parallel, and, lest the reader miss the point, the two themes are drawn together in v. 3. Eternal life turns on nothing more and nothing less than knowledge of the true God. Eternal life is not so much everlasting life as personal knowledge of the Everlasting One.²

Eternal life as a qualitative existence and experience is an emphasis of John’s Gospel. In the Synoptics there is emphasis on the unending blessed existence of eternal life. In John’s Gospel, eternal life is experienced now in this life. In the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, everlasting life is more often than not set forth as a gift of inheritance that believers will receive on the day of the resurrection.

Jesus declared that the essence of eternal life was to know God. When we were working through John 15, we addressed what it is to come to know God and what it is to be a friend of God. It involves two arenas of knowledge as well as a right response to that knowledge. First, we may know God through understanding ***what God is like***, which we would say is a knowledge of His attributes as set forth in the Scriptures. And second, we may know God through our understanding of ***what God is doing in history***. But this knowledge of God must be coupled with a ***resolve to obey God***, working together with Him to advance His purposes in the world. This is what it is to be a friend of God. And according to the Scriptures, every true Christian is a friend of God (cf. John 15:14-16). Granted, none of us knows God fully in these arenas, but each one of us Christians knows Him in a measure and every one of us, who is truly a Christian, is committed to this great calling to know God and live for God. This is eternal life. As our Lord here declared, ***“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God.”***

But our Lord added a second aspect of what it is to have eternal life. Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, ***and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.***” Coming to know God the Father is only possible through coming to know His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ not only is the only Mediator for us in order to bring us to God, but He is the only Mediator to reveal His Father to us. We can only know God the Father through God His Son. As our Lord once declared as recorded in Matthew’s Gospel:

² Carson, p. 556.

“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matt. 11:27)

Here in verse 3 Jesus Christ refers to God to whom He is praying as “*the only true God.*” Those who claim to know God but deny Jesus Christ as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, attempt to use this verse to say that Jesus Himself declared that the Father was the only true God. This is error, of course. The commentator, **Matthew Poole** (1624-1679), wrote of this view:

Those who deny the divine nature of Christ, think that they have a mighty argument from this text, where Christ (as they say), speaking to His Father, calleth Him *the only true God*. But divines (ministers) answer, that the term *only*, or alone, is not to be applied to *Thee* (the Father) but to the term *God*; and the sense is this, To know Thee to be that God which is the only true God: and this appeareth in 1 John 5:20³, where Christ is said to be the true God, which He could not be if the Father were the only true God, considered as another from the Son. The term *only*, or alone, is not exclusive of the other two Persons in the Trinity, but only of idols, the gods of the heathen, which are no gods; so 1 Timothy 6:15, 16, and many other Scriptures...⁴

Similarly **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of this verse:

God is here called the *only true God*, to distinguish Him from the false gods of the heathen, which were counterfeits and pretenders, not from the person of the Son, of whom it is expressly said that He is *the true God and eternal life* (1 John 5:20), and who in this text is proposed as the object of the same religious regard with the Father. It is certain there is but one only living and true God and the God we adore is He. He is the true God, and not a mere name or notion; the only true God, and all that ever set up as rivals with Him are vanity and a lie; the service of Him is the only true religion.⁵

Knowing Jesus Christ with respect to having eternal life involves knowing and believing some essential truths regarding Jesus Christ. This is suggested to us in our text by Jesus Himself. Again, He declared that eternal life is knowing the Father and *Jesus Christ whom the Father had sent*. This reveals that if we know Christ, it is because we understand and believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. He was with the Father before His incarnation, but then the Father *sent* Him into the world to become one of us and one with us in His incarnation. This knowledge of Jesus Christ also includes our understanding in a measure the *purpose* for which the father sent His Son into the world. The Father sent Him to be our Savior and our Lord, the promised King. He would establish the promised kingdom of God in history, which would come into existence through His death, resurrection, and ascension, with His enthronement in heaven. Of course the one who knows Jesus Christ understands the nature of purpose of His death on His cross. He died as a substitute for the sinner that believes on Him solely and wholly as Lord and Savior. Eternal life belongs to those who know these essential truths about Jesus Christ and have embraced Him as the once crucified but risen and enthroned Lord over all. “Knowing in this verse, signifieth not the mere comprehending of God and Christ in men’s notions; but the receiving Christ, believing in Him, loving and obeying Him.”⁶

John Gill (1697-1771) expressed in this way the nature of this knowledge of God and Christ:

this is to be understood of an evangelic knowledge of God, as the God and Father of Christ, as the God of all grace, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin, and of Christ Mediator; not a general, notional, and speculative knowledge; but a practical and experimental one; a knowledge of approbation and

³ 1 John 5:20: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

⁴ Matthew Poole, **A Commentary on the Holy Bible**, vol. 3 (Hendriksen, 2008), p. 367.

⁵ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company).

⁶ Poole, p. 367.

appropriation; a fiducial one, whereby a soul believes in Christ, and trusts in his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice for salvation; and which, though imperfect, is progressive.

Now this knowledge of God the Father and of His Son that is the essence of eternal life is not a matter that can be attained through one's own effort, the desire having been born out of a desire that wells up in his soul apart from the grace of God. This saving knowledge of God and His Son is not the result of personal pursuit and discovery, as it is the result of divine grace in illumination and regeneration. Paul set the matter straight in his appeal to the churches of Galatia not to fall back into legalism. He wrote:

But now that you have come to know God, *or rather to be known by God*, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal. 4:9)

Knowledge of God begins with Him knowing us. And we know from the Scriptures He had foreknown us from eternity.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (1 Pet. 1:1-3)

We read in the Scriptures that we came to love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). We could say with equal conviction, we came to know God because He first had known us, and that from eternity.

We next read in verses 4 and 5 that...

C. Jesus appealed to His Father to glorify Him since He had completed the work the Father sent Him to perform (vs. 4, 5).

We read our Lord's words in **verse 4**, *"I have glorified You on the earth.* All that our Savior did while on earth was intended to bring glory to His Father. "Jesus has so clothed the Father with splendour that many human beings creatures of the earth, not of heaven) have come to praise Him. After all, the incarnation itself was a display of glory."⁷

Jesus declared to His Father, "I have glorified You on earth." This is the sum of His life. Everything that Jesus did throughout His earthly sojourn glorified His Father. But what did this look like? In everything Jesus thought and did, He did nothing with view to promoting or serving Himself, but all that He thought and all that He did was as His Father would have Him do. He lived a life of self-denial and humble submission to whatever the Father brought before Him. He always promoted the name and cause of His Father; never did He promote Himself, His own name.

Here in His declaration of His life well-lived, He did not complain of the hardship or the deprivation He experienced through life. Though He was born into an impoverished family⁸, though He suffered misunderstanding of His words and the rejection of others, even those who were close to Him, He thought not on these things. Rather, He was very pleased that He had finished the work for which His Father had sent Him. He "finished the work", that is, the finish of it was in sight, for the next day His words from the cross would declare, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "It was a strange way for the Son to glorify the Father by abasing Himself (this looked more likely to disparage Him), yet it was contrived that so He should glorify Him" (Matthew Henry).

Jesus said to His Father, *"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.* The Father had sent His Son into the world to do a work on His behalf. His Father had sent Him on a mission to complete.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ When Mary accomplished her time of ceremonial cleansing after giving birth to Jesus, they offered "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons", the offering required of the poor (see Luke 2:24).

He was to be one of us, a human being, His human nature having been joined to His divine nature in His one Person. Through His human nature He accomplished the work to which the Father had assigned Him. As a young man, Jesus referred to this “work” to which the Father had sent Him to have been His Father’s “business.” When Jesus was twelve years of age and He tarried in Jerusalem when His parents had left for their home, He interacted with the teachers of Israel in the temple courts. When His parents found Him and enquired of Him why He had remained in Jerusalem, He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49).⁹ By the time our Lord was 12 years of age, He had acquired understanding (in His human nature) that God was his Father and He was His Son and that He had “business” or a work given to Him by His Father that He was to perform.

It is interesting that our Lord said, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*”, when He had not yet been arrested, tried, and crucified. Had He “finished” His work? Yes, His great trial was before Him, but He had successfully served His Father faithfully throughout His 30+ years on earth, and He had all but reached His end. **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) wrote of this:

His Father gave Him His work, His work in the vineyard, both appointed Him to it and assisted Him in it. *The work that was given Him to do* He finished. Though He had not, as yet, gone through the last part of His undertaking, yet He was so near being *made perfect through sufferings* that He might say, I have finished it; it was as good as done, He was giving it its finishing stroke *eteleiosa —I have finished*. The word signifies His performing every part of His undertaking in the most complete and perfect manner. Herein He glorified His Father; He pleased Him, He praised Him. It is the glory of God that *His work is perfect*, and the same is the glory of the Redeemer; what He is the author of He will be the finisher of. It was a strange way for the Son to glorify the Father by abasing Himself (this looked more likely to disparage Him), yet it was contrived that so He should glorify Him: “*I have glorified Thee on the earth*, in such a way as men on earth could bear the manifestation of Thy glory.”¹⁰

The Father had sent His Son into the world to perform “work.” Jesus saw Himself to be on a mission, to accomplish that for which He was sent. This purpose guided Him and motivated Him throughout His life. At the end of His life on earth He could say to His Father, “*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.*” By way of application, we should understand that our God has also given each of us as Christians a work to do in this life. We may look to the Lord Jesus as an example that we might follow. As one wrote,

1. We must make it our business to do the work God has appointed us to do, according to our capacity and the sphere of our activity; we must each of us do all the good we can in this world.
2. We must aim at the glory of God in all. We must glorify Him on the earth, which He has given *unto the children of men*, demanding only this quit-rent; on the earth, where we are in a state of probation and preparation for eternity. We must persevere herein to the end of our days; we must not sit down till we have finished our work, and *accomplished as a hireling our day*.

As Christians, we should have this understanding of our relationship with God who is our Creator and with His Son our Savior. He has called us out of the fallen kingdom of the evil one into the glorious kingdom of His Son. And He has commissioned us to glorify Him in this world in how we act and react, how we think and how we live. God has given each of us who have come to know Him a purpose, which is a glorious privilege and sacred duty, to which we should give ourselves prayerfully and fully. Every aspect and every detail of our lives are the arena in which we may do the “work” of God, acting and reacting in the way that our Savior and Lord would have us so. Every challenge of life, every relationship that each of us has, comprise the stage on which our life before God is lived. Paul could write of his own life:

⁹ Interestingly, the KJV and the NKJV refers to His Father’s “business.” But most of the modern translators believe He was referring to the temple as His Father’s “house.” The Greek text itself is not clear as to which understanding is correct.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible**, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 1153.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

May He enable each of us see this glorious calling and great privilege to glorify Him in the life that He has given us. May we see this work through to completion, so that each of us will hear our Savior say to us one day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21).

Our Lord concluded His prayer for Himself with these words in **verse 5**, “*And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*” As we voiced last Lord’s Day, this prayer seems to flow forth from our Lord’s part in the eternal covenant of redemption established between the three Persons of the blessed Holy Trinity. In eternity the three Persons of the Trinity covenanted together the redemption of His people from sin and their just damnation. The Father had chosen a vast number of sinners from the fallen world and set His love upon them, purposing to save them unto Himself. The Father had sent His Son into the world to redeem this chosen people. The Son had done so, having committed Himself in eternity to redeem them through His life and death. And the Father had promised His Son that upon the completion of His mission that He would exalt His Son to the supreme seat of authority over creation. The Son could now expect and anticipate His exaltation upon His completion of His work, His terms of the everlasting covenant. Here He concludes His prayer for Himself, petitioning His Father to fulfil His promise to Him. **Matthew Henry** wrote in these terms:

It was according to the covenant between them, that if the Son would *make His soul an offering for sin* He should *divide the spoil with the strong* (Isa. 53:10, 12), and *the kingdom should be His*; and this He had an eye to, and depended upon, in His sufferings; it was *for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross*: and now in His exalted state He still expects the completing of His exaltation, because He perfected His undertaking (Heb. 10:13).¹¹

Our Lord Jesus here refers to His preincarnate glory as the eternally begotten Son of God. This request of Jesus shows that He as the Son of God was equal with His Father in glory prior to His incarnation, as He declared, “the glory which I had with You *before* the world was.” He had the same glory as His Father, along with His Father. He requested of His Father that He return to His preincarnate glory.

This suggests to us that in His incarnation He was not characterized with the glory He had once shared and enjoyed with His Father. When He came into this world, He had set aside His glory, which was the manifestation of His divine authority, by humbling Himself and assuming the lowly stature of a man, even a poor man in this world. Paul had described our Lord setting aside His glory in Philippians 2. Paul wrote,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷*but emptied Himself*, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

When Paul wrote that the Son of God had “emptied Himself”, he was not saying that the divine nature of Christ was suspended or removed or diminished in His incarnation. It is not as though His incarnation was a temporary hiatus of being God and He became man for 33 years, but then returned to become God once again. No, when the Son of God took upon Himself our human nature, it was an action that would continue unto eternity. God had become a man, while remaining God, and will continue forever a man, while ever remaining the Son of God. What Paul was declaring in Philippians 2:7 was that the open manifestation of His divine nature was veiled from view during the days of His earthly sojourn. Here is the footnote to this verse from the Reformation Study Bible on the words, “made Himself of no reputation”:

¹¹ Ibid, p. 1154.

Literally “emptied Himself,” Christ is not said to have removed from Himself His identity as God. The phrase means that He humbled Himself, relinquishing His heavenly status, not His divine being. The nature of His self-emptying is defined in three phrases that follow (“taking...coming...being found”).¹²

In the incarnation the glory of the divine nature of Christ was hidden from view by others about Him. The veil of His flesh hid from our view the glory of His divine nature. This veiled glory was unveiled briefly for Peter, James, and John to behold on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter wrote of this event:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty (glory). ¹⁷For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” ¹⁸we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet. 2:16-18)

On the holy mountain God the Father had conferred a preview to the apostles of the glorification that His Son would receive upon His return to heaven after His resurrection.

Moreover, our Lord Jesus never called upon, or relied upon, His divine authority as the Son of God to perform or accomplish His works on earth, but He entrusted Himself in His human nature to His Father to direct Him and enable Him to do His work, even as He was filled with the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). But very soon, the Father would restore the full manifestation of His glory, the glory that He had with the Father from eternity.

I thought that you would benefit from the comments of **Matthew Henry** on the humiliation and glorification of Jesus Christ the Son of God. They are lengthy, but very good:

See with what confidence He expects *the joy set before Him* (v. 5): *Now, O Father, glorify Thou me.* It is what He depends upon, and cannot be denied Him. *First*, see here what He prayed for: *Glorify Thou Me*, as before (v. 1). All repetitions in prayer are not to be counted *vain repetitions*; Christ *prayed, saying the same words* (Matt. 26:44), and yet *prayed more earnestly*. What His Father had promised Him, and He was assured of, yet He must pray for; promises are not designed to supercede prayers, but to be the guide of our desires and the ground of our hopes. Christ’s being glorified includes all the honours, powers, and joys, of His exalted state. See how it is described.

1. It is a glory with God; not only, *Glorify My name on earth*, but, *Glorify Me with Thine own self*. It was paradise, it was heaven, to be with His Father, as Proverbs 8:30; Daniel 7:13; Heb. 8:1.

Note, the brightest glories of the exalted Redeemer were to be displayed within the veil, where the Father manifests His glory.

The praises of the upper world are offered up *to Him that sits upon the throne and to the lamb* in conjunction (Rev. 5:13), and the prayers of the lower world draw out grace and peace *from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ* in conjunction; and thus the Father has glorified Him with Himself.

2. It is *the glory He had with God before the world was*. By this it appears,

(1) That Jesus Christ, as God, had a being *before the world was*, co-eternal with the Father; our religion acquaints us with one that *was before all things, and by whom all things consist*.

(2.) That His glory with the Father is from everlasting, as well as His existence with the Father; for He was from eternity *the brightness of His Father’s glory* (Heb. 1:3). As God’s making the world only declared His glory, but made no real additions to it; so Christ undertook the work of redemption, not

¹² Sproul, R. C., gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 1877.

because He needed glory, for He had a glory *with the Father before the world*, but because we needed glory.

(3) That Jesus Christ in His state of humiliation divested Himself of this glory, and drew a veil over it; though He was still God, yet He was *God manifested in the flesh*, not in His glory. He laid down this glory for a time, as a pledge that He would go through with His undertaking, according to the appointment of His Father.

(4) That in His exalted state He resumed this glory, and clad Himself again with His former robes of light. Having performed His undertaking, He did, as it were, *repscere pignus—take up His pledge*, by this demand, *Glorify Thou Me*. He prays that even His human nature might be advanced to the highest honour it was capable of, His body a glorious body; and that the glory of the Godhead might now be manifested in the person of the Mediator, Emmanuel, God-man. He does not pray to be glorified with the princes and great men of the earth: no; He that knew both worlds, and might choose which He would have His preferment in, chose it in the glory of the other world, as far exceeding all the glory of this. He had despised *the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them*, when satan offered them to Him, and therefore might the more boldly claim the glories of the other world. *Let the same mind be in us*. “Lord, give the glories of this world to whom Thou wilt give them, but let Me have My portion of glory in the world to come. It is no matter, though I be vilified with men; but, *Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self.*”¹³

Let us now turn our attention to the second major section of our Lord’s high priestly prayer, which is contained in **verses 6 through 19**. [We will not get very far into these verses today, but we will attempt to dip our foot into the matter and stir the waters a bit.]

II. Jesus prays for His apostles (17:6-19)

The majority of content of our Lord’s prayer of John 17 involves Jesus praying for His apostles. Of course we understand that these words given with direct application to His 12 apostles have implications and applications for us also, but we should keep in mind the primary intention and focus of our Lord’s words. Let us read the first three verses of this section¹⁴, **verses 6 through 8**. Jesus declared to His Father,

⁶“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. ⁸For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

It may not be clear immediately that He is praying for His apostles, but it is made clear in later verses. But it is suggested here in **verse 6**, when Jesus prayed, “I *have manifested* Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” He spoke in the past tense, of having already manifested the Father to the men for whom He was praying. This could only be understood as reference to His apostles, those who had traveled with Him from the beginning of His earthly ministry.

Although His own divine glory was hidden from view before all, He disclosed or “manifested” the glory of His Father to His apostles through His earthly ministry that was performed in their presence. In all that He

¹³ Matthew Henry, vol. 5, p. 1153.

¹⁴ Paragraph divisions are helpful aids in understanding texts. Each paragraph contains a single theme or thought to which every sentence in the paragraph relates and/or supports. However, paragraph divisions did not exist in the early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament (by the way, neither are they found in the original KJV). They are supplied by the translators. But various English translations do not agree with one another on paragraph divisions. In this passage of John 17:6-19, the translators of the NKJV designate two paragraphs, one paragraph contains verses 6 through 8, and the second contains verses 9 through 19. The ESV, however, has all of these verses, 6 through 19, set apart in a single paragraph.

did, most saw only Him as the miracle worker and teacher, but to His disciples, He revealed His Father who stood with Him, directed Him, and empowered Him in all that He taught and accomplished.

This statement of Jesus regarding His intention and effort to reveal to His apostles and to them only the glory of His Father betrays and supports the biblical teaching of the sovereign grace of God in His dealings with mankind. The Lord Jesus could have, just as easily, manifested the name of His Father to all who saw and heard Him, but He did not do so. He only manifested the Father during His earthly ministry to those whom the Father had given to Him out of the world. Jesus Christ was not trying to save the world, but the ones whom the Father had chosen and given to Him out of the world. **John Calvin** (1509-1564) wrote of this:

Here Christ begins to pray to the Father for His disciples, and, with the same warmth of love with which He was immediately to suffer death for them, He now pleads for their salvation. The first argument which He employs on their behalf is, that they have embraced the doctrine which makes men actually children of God. There was no want (absence) of faith or diligence on the part of Christ, to call all men to God, but among the elect only was His labor profitable and efficacious. His preaching, which manifested the name of God, was common to all, and He never ceased to maintain the glory of it even among the obstinate. Why then does He say that it was only to a small number of persons that He manifested the name of His Father, but because the elect alone profit by the grace of the Spirit, who teaches inwardly? Let us therefore infer that not all to whom the doctrine is exhibited are truly and efficaciously taught, but only those whose minds are enlightened. Christ ascribes the cause to the election of God; for He assigns no other difference as the reason why he manifested the name of the Father to some, passing by others, but because they were given to Him. Hence it follows their faith flows from the outward predestination of God, and that therefore it is not given indiscriminately to all, because all do not belong to Christ.¹⁵

As we work through our Lord's words to His Father in this Lord's prayer, we will read repeatedly of the sovereign grace of God in His election of sinners, even as He refers to the rest of the fallen world that He leaves to their just condemnation.

Jesus referred to His own as those the Father had given to Him "out of the world." We have spoken about the various possible meanings of this word, "world", even various uses in John's Gospel alone. Here we see that the use of the word, "world", refers to fallen humanity. God chose His people whom He purposed to save from their sins and to give them eternal life. He chose them out of the fallen world.¹⁶

We then read in **verse 7**, Jesus declaring, "***They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.***" This again alludes to God's eternal decree. God the Father had chosen them, purposing to save them from their sin. They belonged to the Father long before they had repented of their sin and believed on the Lord Jesus. God the Father regards all the elect as belonging to Him, not even those who had not yet believed the gospel, but even those His chose before they were ever born into this world.

The election of sinners onto salvation is commonly attributed to be the act of the Father before creation. After having chosen from fallen humanity whom He purposed to save, He gave them—His elect—unto His Son. The Father gave the elect to His Son that they might be His people, even His many brothers and sisters within the extensive family of God, those who are redeemed through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

The Lord also described these apostles, who were numbered among the elect, as having kept the Father's word. This would have been the word or words that Jesus had taught to His apostles throughout His earthly ministry. All the words of Christ were the words of His Father. This shows that the grace of God had

¹⁵ John Calvin, **Calvin's Commentaries**, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 208.

¹⁶ This footnote is not for everyone. Verse 6 may be understood to address the debate between those who hold to an infralapsarian view of the decrees of God and those who espouse a supralapsarian view. The supralapsarian argues that God in His eternal decree first purposed to elect both those He purposed to save and elect those He purposed to damn. Then He decreed the fall of sin through which He would show forth His love for the elect His purpose to dam the reprobate. This position is commonly advocated by those who are hyper Calvinistic in their theology, which is sometimes called double predestination. The infralapsarian, however, argues that God first decree the creation of mankind and its fall into sin, and then He chose or elected His people out of fallen humanity, people whom He purposed to save. Infralapsarianism is the position of our Baptist Confession of 1689, and we would argue that this verse, John 17:6, supports the infralapsarian understanding of the order of God's decrees.

been operative in them to give them understanding of His words, belief in the truthfulness of His words, and the desire and ability to continue in obedience to His words.

Jesus then expressed in His prayer on behalf of His own in **verse 7**, “*Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.*” In their hearing Jesus had declared, “My teaching is not mine, but His who sent Me” (John 7:16). But it would seem that only recently had they truly comprehended His relationship with His Father and how He had revealed the Father to them. We had read in the previous chapter our Lord saying these words to His apostles:

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. ²⁸I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” (John 16:25-28)

And then we read of the response of the apostles to our Lord’s words:

His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! ³⁰Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.” (John 16:29f)

And then our Lord prayed to His Father these words in **verse 8**, “*For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.*” Take notice of the positive manner in which our Lord Jesus spoke of His disciples to His heavenly Father. He spoke highly of them, commending them to His Father as attentive, teachable, understanding, committed, and ever faithful. This is how God regards His elect that are justified before Him through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Here are the words of **Robert Traill** quoted by **J. C. Ryle**:

“Christ tells all the good He can of His disciples, and covers their failings. How poorly had they received Christ’s word? How weak and staggering was their faith! How oft had Christ reproved them sharply for their unbelief and their faults! Yet not a word of all this in Christ’s representing them to His Father! This is the constant gracious way of our High Priest. He makes no mention of Israel’s faults in heaven, but for their expiation.” Man, alas, does the very contrary of all this! He talks of his neighbor’s faults, but not his graces.¹⁷

Let us be as our Lord, thinking well of one another in Christ, overlooking and pardoning that which is defective and deficient, and speaking well of one another in Christ, and desiring and striving to develop that which is good and holy in one another.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 15:13)

¹⁷ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 203.