

The Gospel of John (104): Our Lord's High Priestly Prayer (5)

Introduction:

We have arrived to the third division of our Lord's high priestly prayer that is recorded in John 17. The first portion of this prayer involved Jesus praying for Himself (17:1-5). He then prayed exclusively for His apostles, for they would soon be His primary representatives and spokesmen after He departed from them to return to His Father (17:6-19). And now before us in verses 20 through 26 we read that Jesus prayed for all those who would come to faith in Him through the witness of His apostles. This passage has direct application for all Christians who have lived and truly believed on Jesus Christ since those early apostolic days.

This portion of Scripture has some difficult matters to understand clearly, with a number of different proposals of meaning given by good men through history. We will be reserved in our assertions at one point. But this portion of our Lord's prayer also contains great and blessed promises for Christians, blessings that our Savior secured for us through His prayer to His Father on our behalf. Let us read verses 20 through 26. Jesus prayed to His Father,

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

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

As we were concluding last Lord's Day, we were addressing verses 17 through 19 in which Jesus prayed that His disciples would be "sanctified" by the Father through the means of "truth." Here again is our Lord's petition on behalf of His apostles. Jesus prayed to His Father,

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.

We pointed out that this reference to "sanctification" is not referring to the work of progressive sanctification in the life of the Christian, an understanding of sanctification which we are most familiar. He was not praying here that His disciples would grow in holy behavior and demeanor, becoming over time more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. To sanctify means to "set apart." Jesus was praying that the Father would "sanctify", or set apart His (12) apostles for the office and work of proclaiming the gospel to the fallen world to which they were being sent. The following verse makes this understanding clear. Jesus said to His Father of them, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." Jesus prayed that the Father would set them apart, equipping them and committing to use them as His apostles to proclaim to the world the saving gospel of Jesus Christ (v. 18).

In verse 18 we see that the mission of Jesus and the mission of the church are quite alike. Here Jesus had prayed, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." But even though there is a common mission, there is a great distinction between our Lord and His people in this mission. Here this distinction in our common mission with the Savior is stated well:

The prayer of Jesus reveals that the mission of God involves not only the sending of the Son by the Father but also the sending of the church by the Son (v. 21). Although the Son and the church participate in the one mission of God, their roles can be distinguished by the noticeably different senders. The Son performs the Father's assignment whereas the church receives the assignment from the Son. Thus, the church does not duplicate the mission of the Son (e.g. His sacrificial death)—nor can it, but is instead both a result and extension of the mission of Christ to the world. The church is not only created by the mission of God but facilitates it by becoming a living testimony of God to the world.

For this reason Christ, just moments before completing His mission on the cross, offered a prayer of consecration for His church, dedicating it to God the Father for His purposes and protection and entrusting it to the persevering presence of the Spirit/Paraclete. Christ dedicated Himself to this very purpose (v. 19) and offers the disciples to God as an extension of His own purpose and work. The mission of God therefore is neither an option for the church nor an add-on to its already established purpose and program. The mission of God embraces the church, and this pericope exhorts the church to live “sent,” like Christ Himself.¹

And then in verse 19 Jesus explained further that He was requesting that the Father would “sanctify” them in the same manner that He had “sanctified” Himself. The truth, to which they were to bear witness, set them apart was the very meaning and purpose of their lives. Upon the Lord Jesus departing from them and returning to heaven to His Father, they were to devote themselves fully and wholly to make the gospel known to the world. It follows, therefore, that Jesus would then pray for the ones who would receive salvation through that gospel that His apostles would proclaim and record. And so in verses 19-26 we read that...

III. Jesus prayed for all true believers (17:20-26)

Jesus included in His prayer all who have come to faith and all who will yet come to saving faith through the word of the Apostles.² This prayer, offered up by Christ just minutes before His arrest, was designed to encourage His disciples who were in His hearing, but also to instruct and encourage all believers in all times. He prays for the union of His people with one another, as well as with Himself and His Father, which results in great blessings being conferred upon them. Let us consider these words and the encouragement they bring to us.

We first read that Jesus specified in His prayer those for whom He was praying. He was praying not only for His apostles, but for all who would believe through their word, that they all may be “one.” Verses 20 and 21 record, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”*

Let us consider what distinguishes or establishes the identity of these ones for whom He prays. Jesus said that they are “those who will *believe in Me*.” What ultimately distinguishes and identifies these people is their faith. This would involve the fact that they all believe (subjective), and that what they believe (objective) is the same for all of them. Here in John 17:20 Jesus is referring to subjective faith, the fact that every one of His people are believers. This is what distinguishes us from the fallen people of the world who are *un*believers. There are numbers of verses that speak of blessed promises for those who believe.

John 3:18. “Whoever *believes* in Him (Christ) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 728.

² We believe that upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ, all believers through the ages prior to the coming of Christ were also brought into the state and enjoyment of the blessings set forth through these words of the Savior. Hebrews 11:39f speaks of the purpose of God in withholding the fulness of salvation blessings from OT saints until we all—NT believers—come to faith in Christ. “And all these (OT saints), having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”

John 3:36. “Whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

Hebrews 11:6. “And *without faith* it is impossible to please Him...”

Of course saving faith is due to the grace of God operating upon and within the soul of the one who truly believes. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 states, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Saving faith is not the product of a man’s understanding and will apart from the grace of God. Saving faith is the product, even the outworking of God’s grace in the soul. We might say that God saves His people *through* faith, not *because* of faith. He saves His people because of Christ alone, God by His grace using faith to bring His people to receive the blessings of Christ as Lord and Savior.

It is a very sad and unfortunate fact, however, that there are multitudes who assume that any kind of “believing” in Jesus may be regarded as saving faith. It is thought that if a person “believes”, he is to be regarded and treated as a Christian. But the subjective faith that is of a saving kind is qualified in the Word of God. This is why we must frequently refer to Christians as “*true* believers”, who exhibit not simply faith, but “*saving* faith.”

What is faith and what kind of faith is it that God requires? Saving faith is the faith of God’s elect.³ It is the faith that is produced and sustained by the grace of God.⁴ The Scriptures teach that saving faith must have three elements or it is not saving faith. (1) Faith must first be based on an understanding of truth; therefore, there must be knowledge. (2) Second, there must be an affirmation that knowledge is indeed true. Not all who have knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ believe it to be true. (3) And third there must be a trust and commitment to that truth; one must believe and act upon that truth. Faith is like a three-legged stool, remove one of these three and it is not faith.

But saving faith that is born and sustained by the grace of God has certain characteristics that distinguishes it from faith that does not save the soul from sin. Although we cannot be exhaustive here, we may cite a few of these essential qualities of saving faith. First, when one has saving faith, he humbly acknowledges his guilt for sin before God and that he is incapable of doing anything to remove his guilt or remedy his condition. Second, the one with saving faith has come to understand that if he is to have salvation, it must be due to the mercy of God alone, for he believes rightly that he is deserving of damnation by the just and holy God who holds him accountable for what he does in this life. Third, the one who has saving faith has heard and believes that only through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone as his Lord and Savior can he receive salvation from God. He knows that there is no amount of good works or intensity of feeling or sincerity can atone for his sin. Fourth, the believing sinner knows and seeks to repent of his sin before God, knowing that his faith must be manifested in his turning from living in and for sin to live before God in Jesus Christ. And fifth, he has come to see and believe that all that he must know and believe regarding his salvation from sin is contained and set forth in the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, the inspired Word of God. In short, saving faith, one’s subjective faith, must be based on and informed by an objective faith, what it is that is believed, and that objective faith is set forth in the Holy Scriptures.

Again, subjective faith is that a person believes; objective faith is what it is that person believes. When the apostle Paul wrote of the matters that Christians have in common, he referenced this objective faith. He declared, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, *one faith*, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6). These words describe what all Christians have in common, namely, we have all received the initial effectual calling into a secure and settled hope of our salvation, we all have the same Lord, even Jesus Christ, and we all have affirmed the one faith in that Lord, all of us confessing that faith in Christ through our one baptism.

But in addition to these objective truths that the true believer embraces, saving faith is evidenced by other qualities. *First, saving faith is an enduring, overcoming faith.* Temporary faith is not saving faith. It is “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death” (Rev. 2:11). And Jesus said, “To him who

³ Titus 1:1

⁴ 1 Peter 1:5

overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7). This enduring faith is in contrast to those who believe only for a time, but then forsake Christ. Christ declared, “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13). And Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:1ff:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you-- unless you believed in vain. (1 Cor. 15:1f).

Second, saving faith is also manifested in the way of life of the true believer. Hypocrites are those who profess to believe in Christ, but their lives show forth that they are void of saving faith.

Titus 1:16. “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.”

They may be ones who claim to be true believers, but they are ones who refuse or fail to walk in the narrow way of faithful obedience that leads to eternal life. Jesus spoke of them in this way:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt. 7:13f)

We may also consider what Paul wrote to the church at Philippi regarding hypocrites.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. ¹⁸**For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.** ²⁰For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phil. 3:17-21).

In this Philippians passage Paul was not writing of unbelievers, but of professing believers who were not living as Christians. They were not characterized as ones who denied themselves, taking up the cross of Christ, and following Christ.

And then **third, saving faith endures through trials, even great trials and troubles.** Peter wrote of the necessity of various trials that all Christians experience, though to different degrees.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, **though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,** ⁷**that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,** ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end (outcome) of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

Let us return to verse 20 in which Jesus stated, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” Jesus then made the specific request to His Father to grant believers in Him this blessing: **“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me”** (v. 21). This request is much like Jesus declared in verse 11. There He spoke concerning His apostles, “Now 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.*” But here in verse 21 He is praying for the same blessing to be conferred upon all those who would come to believe on Him through the word of the apostles.

When we addressed verse 11, we mentioned how this verse, as well as the one before us—verse 21—has been often cited as an argument for the organizational unity of churches. Those who promote this ecumenical agenda say, “Jesus prayed to His Father that we should all be one. But just look at us! There are so many divisions and so many conflicting denominations. We need to work together toward unity so that we may be one as Jesus had prayed. Then the world will believe.” But this is a terrible abuse and misunderstanding of our Lord’s request to the Father on our behalf. First of all, we should not presume that our failure to comply with their stated claims has resulted in frustrating Jesus from having His prayer answered by His Father. The Father of the Lord Jesus does not refuse or fail to answer the prayer of His Son contingent on whether or not we choose to obey or conform to His will. Second, we would argue that every prayer of the Son of God was answered by His Father. Jesus Himself suggested this when He prayed, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me...” (John 11:41). And we would assert that the Father granted this petition of His Son. In answer to the prayer of Jesus, we may affirm that we are all presently “one”, just as the Son and the Father are one. The reason that people throughout the world have believed the message of the gospel during these past two millennia is because the Father granted this request of our Savior on our behalf.

What, then, does it mean for us “*all to be one, as the Father and the Son are one*”? It means that just as the Father and the Son are one in purpose and intent to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, so we are one with them and in them in this grand enterprise. We have a unity of intention and purpose to which we are all (to be) committed, even proclaiming the gospel so that believers all over the world would receive eternal life that is in His Son. Here are the words of **Donald Carson** (b. 1947):

Similarly, the believers, still distinct, are to be one in purpose, in love, in action undertaken with and for one another, in joint submission to the revelation received. More: Jesus prays to His Father that these disciples may *also be in us*, probably alluding to the ‘union’ language of the vine metaphor (ch. 15). They are ‘in’ the Father and His Son, so identified with God and dependent upon Him for life and fruitfulness, that they themselves become the locus of the Father’s life and work *in* them (cf. 14:12; 15:7). All of this is to the end *that the world may believe that You have sent Me*. As the display of genuine love amongst the believers attests that they are Jesus’ disciples (13:34-35), so this display of unity is so compelling, so unworldly, that their witness as to who Jesus is becomes explainable only if Jesus truly is the reveler Whom the Father has sent.⁵

We may next give our attention to our Lord’s words in **verses 22 and 23**. Jesus prayed, “*And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*”

Jesus stated to the Father what He had done for His people, for those who believe on Him. Jesus said, “*And the glory which You gave Me I have given them...*” We are not addressing easy matters in these verses. Carson wrote, “Exactly what is meant by these clauses is much disputed.”⁶ Beasley-Murray said of these words, “Unfortunately the precise nature of that ‘glory’ given to believers is uncertain.”⁷ When one considers the many and varied opinions as to the meaning of “glory” in this verse, I am less troubled at my own inability to be absolutely certain as to its meaning.⁸ Some have said that this ‘glory’ is the *name* of God

⁵ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), p. 568.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 568.

⁷ George R. Beasley-Murray, **John**, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Thomas Nelson, 1999), p. 302.

⁸ J. C. Ryle gave a number of proposals of the meaning of this verse: “This is a very difficult expression, and one which seems to puzzle all commentators. The knotty problem to be solved is, what did our Lord mean by “the glory” which He gave.

(a) Some, as Calvin, think that “glory” means the image of and likeness of God, by which the disciples were renewed (2 Cor. 3:18).

and the *words* of God given to Jesus that are then given to His disciples. Others have said that this is the *eternal life* that is imparted to the disciples who believe on Him. Others have said this ‘glory’ is the *gift* of the Son of God Himself, or the *purpose* of God that is shared between the Father, the Son, and the believers in Jesus. Actually throughout this passage it has been revealed that we as believers are brought to share along with the Father and the Son the same purpose, love, and activity, but here Jesus speaks of shared “glory” that He had given to all of His disciples.

This glory does not belong to the church but to God from whom it was received and with whom it is shared. Since “glory” is “the manifestation of God’s being, nature and presence, in a manner accessible to human experience,” Jesus asks the Father to consecrate the disciples’ participation in the fulness of God for the purpose of including them in the personal manifestation of God through Christ, which is again depicted as the great act of unification (cf. 21).⁹

I suppose if we were to attempt to put this in everyday language we would say that Jesus Christ declared in His prayer to His Father that through Himself He had revealed the glory of God to His disciples and through them He secured the revelation of God’s glory to all those who would believe through their word. And so, through such a share in the glory of God through their experience of the glorious presence of God in Christ, they would be able to manifest the presence of the glory of God in the world before which they were to bear witness. I would tend to regard this bestowal of “glory” on His people to be regal honor and authority to fulfil their mission to the world.

As Christians we already enjoy a degree of glory that He has bestowed upon us. But God has promised us that we will receive glory at His coming and upon our resurrection that surpasses our imagination to contemplate fully. Paul wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:18f). This glory is the honor and authority that will be granted us to reign with Him in “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). This is our inheritance as the children of God, even sharing in the glory of Jesus Christ that He has given to us.

We read in John 17:21 that having the glory of God revealed to us and manifested to us through Christ results in us becoming one with the Father and His Son. Again, Jesus prayed, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, ***that they may be one just as We are one.***” There is a participation that all believers have in the life that is in and with God. This of course does not speak about divinizing our human nature, which would be heresy¹⁰, but because the glory of God has been given to us by Jesus Christ, even the glory He shares with His Father, we are brought into the sphere of that blessing of true life.

(b) Some, as Bengal, think that the “glory” means that insensible power, influence, and authority, which accompanied all our Lord did and said during His earthly ministry. Thus Moses had “glory” in his countenance when coming down from the mount (2 Cor. 3:7). This same power and influence Christ gave to the Apostles (See Acts 4:33).

(c) Some, as Zwingle (Zwingli), Brentius, Gualter, and Pearce, think that “glory” means the power of working miracles, which was the special and peculiar glory of our Lord while He was on earth. Thus, we read, “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4).

(d) Some, as Augustine, Ecolampadius, Bullinger, and Manton, think that “glory” means the heavenly glory and immortality which our Lord promised to His disciples,-- a glory which they should have after faithfully serving Him on earth ((Rom. 8:18).

(e) Toletus makes the strange suggestion, that the “glory” means that which is communicated to us in the Lord’s Supper!

(f) Stier and Hengstenberg hold that the “glory” means unity of mind and heart.

(g) Some, as Gregory, Nyssen, Ammonius, Theophylact, and Bucer, think that “glory” means the Holy Ghost, who is elsewhere called “the Spirit of glory” (1 Pet. 4:14).

The question will probably never be settled. If I must give an opinion, I prefer the last view to any other. It suits the end of the verse better than any other. Nothing was so likely to make the disciples “one” as the gift of the Holy Ghost. Do we not read of the “unity of the Spirit” (Ryle)?

⁹ Klink, p. 723.

¹⁰ As the Mormons and other cults teach.

And then in **verse 23** expresses this spiritual unity that all Christians share with the Father and His Son and the purpose for which this is manifested in us and through us. ***“I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”*** All true Christians have an unbreakable bond with one another and with their Savior, who has an indissoluble relationship with the Father. Here Jesus Christ is set forth as our Mediator. He relates to us and He relates to His Father. He is the bridge which enables the unity that we have with the Father. This is a perfect unity, which knows no defection or separation, and which knows of no end. We are to bear witness to the world of the relationship of our Savior to our Father. We are to bear witness to the truth that the Father had sent His Son into the world because He loved His people and desired and purposed to save them from sin and damnation.

Here we read what we may regard as one of the most mysterious and marvelous statements of Holy Scripture. Through our relationship with one another and through our Christian witness to the world, the world is to come to understand and acknowledge that God the Father had sent His Son into the world because the Father loved us, His people, ***with the same love that he loves His Son.***

First let us acknowledge the Father’s love for us was antecedent to Him sending His Son into the world to save us from our sin. We were loved from eternity, because He set His love upon us. What God had revealed to His prophet Jeremiah can be said of every individual saved through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah declared, “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (Jer. 31:3). The eternal love of the Father toward us was not drawn out of Him because of who we are or due to what we would become, but because in the sovereign purpose of God He chose to love us. He set His heart upon us, in which He purposed to save us from our sin. We sing the hymn, “I am His and He is Mine.”¹¹

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Gracious Spirit from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!
O this full and perfect peace!
O this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.

This love was conferred upon us by God, not elicited by us from God. And this love is His everlasting love. And as Jesus described it before us, it is the same love that the Father has for Him. The Apostle John, who heard and recorded these words of our Savior would later write in his short epistle:

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1)

The world does not know now or acknowledge of the love that God has for us, His people. And we may not know it fully now. One day, however, we will fully realize the weight of this blessing and the unsaved world will also be convinced of this reality. Again we read our Lord’s words of prayer to His Father, “I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and ***that the world may know*** that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” It was said of this truth:

Behold it with faith and confidence as a certain truth; with joy and delight, as a blessed privilege: as it is a certain truth, we should believe it more firmly; as it is an important truth, we should consider it more seriously; as it is a comfortable truth, we should improve it more effectually, to our great joy and satisfaction in all considerations... Certainly God excelleth all temporal relations; never father had such

¹¹ Under the title, “Loved with Everlasting Love” in the Trinity Hymnal, #703

bowels and affections. We were never in the bosom of God, to know His heart; but the only Son of God, that came out of His bosom, He hath told us tidings of it, and hath bidden us come boldly and call Him Father.¹²

This love that the Father has for us is due to our union with Jesus Christ. We were chosen “in Him” from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). God the Father loves us with the same love that He has for His Son, for He sees us in union with His Son. But God loves us also because we are being conformed to the image of His Son. As **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) wrote:

Likeness is another ground of love. God loveth Christ, not only as His Son, but as His image, He being ‘the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person’ (Heb. 1:3). So He loveth the saints (Christians), who are by grace renewed after His image: Colossians 3:10, “And that ye put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him;” and who thereby made “partakers of the divine nature,” 2 Peter 1:4. We lost by Adam the image of God and the favour of God; now, first His image is repaired in us, then His love and favour is bestowed on us; without this we could not be lovely in His eye, for we are amiable in the sight of God by reason of that comeliness (beauty) He has put on us.¹³

Because God the Father loves His people with the same love that He has for His Son, we may state certain true realities regarding God’s love for us who are chosen in Christ. *First, the love of God is free*, that is, it is bestowed upon us freely, received and enjoyed without regard to anything of us or in us apart from our union with Jesus Christ.

So is God’s love to us free and undeserved; His love is the reason of itself; He loved us because He loved us: Deuteronomy 7:7, 8, “The Lord did not set His love on you, or choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; but because the Lord loved you.” There is the last cause, God’s act is its own law and reason, and we can give no other account.¹⁴

Arthur Pink (1886-1952) wrote of the free love of God for His people and that there was nothing in us, of us, from us, due to us, that moved God to love us.

“We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God did not love us because we loved Him, but He loved us before we had a particle of love for Him. Had God loved us in return for ours, then it would not be spontaneous on His part; but because He loved us when we were loveless, it is clear that His love was uninfluenced. It is highly important if God is to be honored and the heart of His child established, that we should be quite clear upon this precious truth. God’s love for me, and for each of “His own,” was entirely unmoved by anything in them. What was there in me to attract the heart of God? Absolutely nothing. But, to the contrary, everything to repel Him, everything calculated to make Him loathe me—sinful, depraved, a mass of corruption, with “*no good thing*” in me.

“What was there in me that could merit esteem,
Or give the Creator delight?
‘Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,
Because it seemed good, in Thy sight.”¹⁵

¹² Thomas Manton, **The Complete Works of Thomas Manton**, vol. XI (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 78.

¹³ Ibid, p. 79. We would correct one statement that Manton made here, that “We lost by Adam the image of God.” The image of God was not lost to mankind, but greatly damaged due to Adam’s sin. To be a human being is to be the image of God, which cannot be extinguished. It can become, and is certainly, defaced and horribly defiled and corrupted, but fallen people are still the image of God. To cease to be His image would be to cease to be human.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Arthur Pink, **The Attributes of God** (Reiner Publications, n.d.), pp. 91f.

But not only is the love of God free toward us. *Second*, because God the Father loves us with the same love that He has for His Son, *His love for us is tender and affectionate*. The love of God may be illustrated by a father's love for his child.

“As a father pities his children,
So the LORD pities those who fear Him” (Psa. 103:13).

The love of God the Father for His people may be illustrated by the love a groom has for his bride.

“And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So shall your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:5)

The tender love of God the Father for His people may be illustrated by the care and concern that a man would have for his own eye.

For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye. (Zech. 2:8)

Third, the love of God for us is infinite in degree and eternal in duration. The infinite love of God can be expressed best and most fully as the love that God has for Himself. Of course we understand this love to be manifested between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. God the Father loves God the Son with infinite love. God the Son loves the Father with infinite love. The Father and the Son love the Holy Spirit with infinite love. And the Holy Spirit loves God the Father and His Son with infinite love. God loves Himself supremely because He is infinitely good and is infinitely deserving of love.

The love of God, then, begins with divine self-love, as God Himself is the greatest good. The ‘primary object of God’s love is Himself’, says Edward Leigh, ‘for He taketh great pleasure in Himself, and is the author of greatest felicity (pleasure, delight) toward Himself’.¹⁶

Fourth, although in the present time we may contemplate and enjoy the degree of God’s love for us in Christ, *in heaven, in eternity, we will know and enjoy this love of God*. **Jonathan Edwards** (1703-1758) wrote regarding what one day we will all experience and enjoy.

There, even in heaven, dwells the God from whom every stream of holy love, yea, every drop that is, or ever was, proceeds. There dwells God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, united as one, in infinitely dear, and incomprehensible, and mutual, and eternal love. There dwells God the Father, who is the father of mercies, and so the father of love, who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son to die for it. There dwells Christ, the Lamb of God, the prince of peace and of love, who so loved the world that He shed His blood, and poured out His soul unto death for men. There dwells the great Mediator, through whom all the divine love is expressed toward men, and by whom the fruits of that love have been purchased, and through whom they are communicated, and through whom love is imparted to the hearts of all God’s people. There dwells Christ in both His natures, the human and the divine, sitting on the same throne with the Father. And there dwells the Holy Spirit — the Spirit of divine love, in whom the very essence of God, as it were, flows out, and is breathed forth in love, and by whose immediate influence all holy love is shed abroad in the hearts of all the saints on earth and in heaven. There, in heaven, this infinite fountain of love — this eternal Three in One — is set open without any obstacle to hinder access to it, as it flows forever. There this glorious God is manifested, and shines forth, in full glory, in beams of love. And there this glorious fountain forever flows forth in streams, yea, in rivers of love and delight, and these rivers swell, as it were, to an ocean of love, in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe with the sweetest enjoyment, and their hearts, as it were, be deluged with love!

¹⁶ Terry Johnson, **The Identity and Attributes of God** (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), p. 286.

Edwards wrote further of the love between believers in heaven.

The saints shall know that God loves them, and they shall never doubt the greatness of His love, and they shall have no doubt of the love of all their fellow inhabitants in heaven. And they shall not be jealous of the constancy of each other's love. They shall have no suspicion that the love which others have felt toward them is abated, or in any degree withdrawn from themselves for the sake of some rival, or by reason of anything in themselves which they suspect is disagreeable to others, or through any inconstancy in their own hearts or the hearts of others. Nor will they be in the least afraid that the love of any will ever be abated toward them. There shall be no such thing as inconstancy and unfaithfulness in heaven, to molest and disturb the friendship of that blessed society. The saints shall have no fear that the love of God will ever abate towards them, or that Christ will not continue always to love them with unabated tenderness and affection. And they shall have no jealousy one of another, but shall know that by divine grace the mutual love that exists between them shall never decay nor change.

The kind of love that we will have for one another that we will enjoy in heaven should be manifested by us for one another in this world in this life. Jesus had declared,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34f)

We are to show forth our love for one another that we will one day show forth in glory. We should abandon suspicion and the presumption of fault, and believe the best of our brethren and desire and seek the best for them. We are not to harbor resentment or bitterness, but truly and sincerely desire and pray for God's greatest blessing upon them. Rather than trying to put another out of our mind and away from us, we are to take him or her to heart and make him the subject of our prayers to God. When we hear that a brother or sister is overtaken in sin, it should grieve us, if proven to be true, and it should move us to pray and to seek his correction and recovery. We are not to denounce and demean, but to pray for and lovingly exhort one another before the Lord. We are to love other Christians as we love ourselves. We are to be as merciful to others as we would desire that they would be merciful toward us. We are to be patient toward others as we would have them be patient for us. We should pray for others as we would desire that they pray for us. For we know, that the manner in which we deal with others will be the same manner that will be dealt toward us. May the Lord give us tender hearts and affection for one another. May our Lord help us to grow and mature in these matters of true biblical love, true biblical fellowship.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith,
praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God,
looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
(Jude 20, 21)
