

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer—Identity (John 17:6-12)

Jesus spoke intimately with His Father, praying for Himself, His disciples, and those who would believe in Him down through the ages. Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, recorded in John 17, includes the themes of glory, identity, purity, and unity. Having prayed that the Father would glorify the Son, Jesus now turns to interceding for His disciples. These disciples belonged to the Father who gave them to Jesus. This concept of the disciples being a gift from the Father points out the fact that their identity was wrapped up in their relationship with the Father and the Son. We belong to God. Through faith in Jesus we become members of God's family. Our identity is rooted in our living relationship with the living God.

Those who belong to the Father receive God's truth (17:6-8).

Jesus had previously indicated that His disciples were a gift from the Father (John 17:2). This idea of a gift permeates John 17:6-12. Jesus' followers belong to the Father in an eternal relationship based on Jesus' sacrificial work. Those who belong to the Father can be known by their response to God's truth.

Jesus revealed the Father to His disciples and they obeyed the Father's Word (17:6).

Jesus stated that He had manifested the Father's name to those whom the Father had given to Him. The Father's name refers to His character, His divine nature. By taking on human form Jesus revealed the very nature and character of God among His followers. The Father had given these followers to Jesus "out of the world." Having been a part of the world, that is, the unbelieving and self-oriented mass of humanity Jesus' followers were now set apart in a new relationship with the Father. They belonged to the Father and the Father gave them to the Son. As a result, these disciples obeyed the Father's Word. Obedience to God's Word is a mark of true faith. Jesus is describing the gracious and mysterious work of the Father in drawing people to Himself and to His Son in an act of saving grace (compare John 6:37, 44). Those who believe in Jesus Christ are a gift from the Father to the Son, a truly remarkable truth.

The disciples came to recognize that Jesus had been sent by the Father (17:7-8).

Jesus claimed that His disciples recognized a unique relationship between Him and God the Father. They now knew that what Jesus possessed was a gift from the Father. Among these gifts from the Father were the very words, or teachings, of Jesus. The Father had given these words to Jesus, and Jesus had given them to His disciples. Jesus and the Father are one both in essence and in expression of truth. Jesus' words were the Father's words. These words, these truths found a welcome reception on the part of Jesus' disciples. The disciples knew, based on Jesus' teachings, that Jesus came from the Father. They believed that the Father sent Jesus into the world. In other words, the disciples came to the realization that Jesus is God in the flesh, the messianic Son of God. Those who belong to the Father receive God's truth.

**Those who belong to the
Father glorify God's Son (17:9-10).**

In addition to receiving God's truth, those who belong to the Father will glorify God's Son. No one can have a relationship with God apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus specifically prayed for His disciples since they belonged to the Father (17:9).

Jesus interceded for His disciples. Praying to the Father, Jesus distinguished His disciples from the rest of the world. In that moment Jesus, knowing He would soon return to heaven, was concerned about how His disciples would fare on their own in the world. The fact that Jesus didn't pray for the world in that moment doesn't mean that He didn't have a heart for lost people. He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). But Jesus could not pray for the Father to bless the rebellious world. He did, however, pray for His disciples so that they could thrive spiritually in the midst of this dark world. Again, Jesus referenced the fact that His followers belonged to the Father and were a gift from the Father. Since they belonged to the Father, Jesus could rightly pray that the Father would protect them in the world.

Jesus declared that He had received glory through the lives of His disciples (17:10).

In His prayer Jesus affirmed that everything belonging to Him belonged equally to the Father. Likewise, all that belonged to the Father belonged to the Son. There is equality within the triune godhead. Furthermore, because Jesus' disciples had their identity in their faith relationship with God they glorified Jesus Christ. The very fact that these disciples followed Jesus and believed in Him brought glory to the Son. Those who belong to God will glorify Jesus Christ. There is no relationship with God apart from Jesus.

**Those who belong to the
Father are preserved by God's power (17:11-12).**

Jesus' followers have their identity in their relationship with God. That identity guarantees God's powerful protection and preservation.

Jesus asked the Father to preserve the disciples by His powerful name (17:11).

Jesus knew that His time had come. He would soon be crucified, raised, and exalted to heaven. He was about to fulfill His mission on earth. However, Jesus' disciples would remain in the world after Jesus returned to the Father. They would need help. Jesus addressed the Father as "Holy Father," a reminder that God is set apart from sin and perfectly holy in His character and works. Jesus asked the Father to "keep," meaning to preserve and protect, these disciples whom the Father had given to Him. Since the Father had given these disciples to Jesus it only made sense that the Father would want to protect them in this world. Jesus knew that the Father could preserve these disciples by His "name," referring again to God's divine nature including His unlimited power. One aspect of the Father's preserving power in the lives of Jesus' disciples

would be their unity. Jesus asked the Father to make His disciples “one” just as He and the Father are one. The spiritual unity of Jesus’ followers is like the unity within the triune godhead—we are inseparably linked with one another through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus had preserved His disciples by His own powerful name (17:12).

Jesus prayed that the Father would preserve the disciples. During His earthly ministry Jesus had performed that function Himself. Jesus stated that He had been with His disciples, meaning that He had maintained a close relationship with them. He also “kept” (preserved and protected) them. He did so by the Father’s name, the Father’s divine nature which belonged also to Jesus. The Father had “given” His own name to Jesus. The Father and the Son shared in the same divine essence and character. Jesus had “kept” His disciples and He had “guarded” them—protected them from attack. As a result, none had defected, that is fallen into destruction, with the exception of Judas, “the son of destruction.” Judas’ departure was a fulfillment of Scripture, possibly Psalm 69:25 or Psalm 109:6-8. While His faithful disciples had been given to Jesus by the Father, Judas had never placed his identity in Jesus Christ. He was the son of destruction, a man characterized by a destructive and faithless heart. Apart from Judas, however, Jesus had preserved and protected His disciples. Now that Jesus was returning to heaven He interceded with the Father to provide that protection for them. Those who belong to God can expect the preserving hand of God in their lives. Because we belong to God our identity is wrapped up in our relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Our identity is rooted in our living relationship with the living God.