

# The High Priestly Prayer

Part 5

*John 17:20-23*

*With Study Questions*

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**I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> 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 (John 17:20-23).**

## **Introduction**

We live in an age where certain words, terms or ideas are celebrated as if they have inherent virtue. These words, terms and ideas often become sound-bites used to hide reality. For example, choice, tolerance, discrimination, education appear on posters as if they are intrinsically good with little or no evaluation given to what the choice might be or should or should not be tolerated.

The word discrimination made the transition from that which described a wise person, able to distinguished good from evil to bigotry. Education has become a political buzzword for any candidate wishing to win an election. Education has become a good word, regardless of what ungodly principles the educational curriculum might contain.

Now before I'm accused of endorsing slavery, chauvinism and ignorance I hasten to say that I'm not against the freedom to make choices. I am not against tolerance or education. What I am seeking to convey is that these words, terms and ideas are, in themselves, morally vacuous. If freedom of choice means people have the right to choose to who their leaders will be, it can be good. If it means they have the right to choose to kill their neighbor, it's bad.

If tolerance means being patient and forbearing in the face of someone else's difficult personality then it is good. If tolerance means allowing a coworker or co-student to physically or verbally abuse your friend, tolerance has become negligence.

Generally speaking we might view education as a good thing. But education is not the source of that which is good. It can easily be argued that the most evil people who have ever cursed this planet were highly educated. The point I am laboring is the need for objective moral or ethical content in order for these words, terms or ideas to mean anything at all.

As we embark upon this fifth message on the High Priestly Prayer by Jesus, the word that comes to mind is diversity – is it good or bad? You may have a reaction to this word. If so, it's probably due to the context in which you have heard it used. Let's keep this on the backburner of our minds as we approach this passage.

## Review

In quick review we have observed this great privilege of being invited to hear how our High Priest prays for us. With betrayal and the cross (the hour) directly before Him, Jesus begins the prayer by praying for Himself. He prays the Father will glorify Him that He might into glorify the Father that He might give eternal life to those given to Him by the Father.

We learn from this pray that eternal life is synonymous with knowing the “**only true God.**” We learned that Jesus *finishes* the work of redemption to which we can add nothing. He finished a work we couldn't even begin. Jesus reveals, or manifests, the Father to men which is evidenced by their receiving of the word.

From there we learn of the particular love and prayer Jesus has for the elect, the glorious possessiveness God has for His children, the love and care Jesus has that the Father keep His children in the faith, protected from the evil and growing in their sanctification which is accomplished by the word of God. We continue:

**I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word (John 17:20).**

## Future Believers

Jesus now unveils just how far He extends this prayer. It is not merely for the religious big-shots – apostles, pastors, teachers and

evangelists. It is more as if we are bound up into one package addressed to glory. We will see this portion of the prayer packed with a call to unity. Not only are all the saints through the history of the world included in this bundle – but the unity and assurance is, as it were, found in Jesus Himself – who is said to be so attached to believers that He is their head – not merely in the sense of a leader but in these sense of an organic union. Where the head goes, the body goes.

How comforting this is for those of us with little and struggling faith. Who may feel dwarfed in comparison to the giants and notables by which we are surrounded. Earlier this week the parents were invited to youth group to see what takes place. We were given a presentation then invited to participate in the singing and games. One of the games was ‘drop the keys’ – kind of a combination of duck-duck-goose and musical chairs.

One person is given keys, then walks through a circle of chairs taking a hand of one of the seated people, who in turns take someone else’s hand. This continues until there is a line of people holding hands walking around. When the first person drops the keys everyone must find a chair. The person who fails to find a chair becomes the key-dropper for the next game.

One of the leaders made the comment “Pick someone who hasn’t been picked.” This reminded me of my youth – being in similar games and not being picked. It also reminded me of being a youth pastor and being concerned that no child is neglected or hurt. To this day I have a similar concern for those in our church who might feel left out or neglected.

Jesus prays for us all – as one body – for our faith and protection and future – the way my wife and I might pray for the future spouses of our children and their yet unborn children. When we are met by the weakness of our own flesh, the bombardment of the world or the fiery darts of the enemy of our souls, let us stand behind the shield of the prayer of our faithful High Priest.

Let us all be encouraged that God has made us, Jesus has purchased us and He prays for us. There is something firm and exact to the plan of God which should grant rest for our souls. We are the recipients God’s glorious redemption.

**A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the *next* generation, <sup>31</sup> They will come and declare His**

righteousness to a people who will be born, That He has done *this* (Psalm 22:30, 31).

**Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).**

Once again we learn of the means by which the grace of God in Christ moves from generation to generation – those who believe in Me, Jesus prays **“through their word.”** Let us take to heart the call we have to proclaim the word of God **“on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27).**

Jesus had prayed for the church’s purity he prays for their unity.

**...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. <sup>22</sup> And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: <sup>23</sup> 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 (John 17:20-23).**

## Glory

In this somewhat, difficult to follow, portion of the prayer we see oneness of the Father and the Son as the basis for the prayer for the unity of the Father, Son and the body of Christ. The Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father – with this backdrop Jesus prays that Christians be one with the Father and Son – the goal of which being that the world may *believe* the Father sent the Son.

In verse twenty-three Jesus will state how He is in the believer and the Father is in Him – again establishing perfect oneness – the goal stated a different way – that the world may *know* that the Father sent the Son and that the Father loves them the way the Father loves His only begotten Son.

This will lead us back to our discussion on the word diversity. But before we get there let us seek to understand verse twenty-two. Jesus is indicating something He has already done – given Christians **“the glory”** which the Father had given Him in order to produce that unity or oneness. It might be helpful to consider just what that glory might be.

Since it is not specifically stated, we cannot offer with certain confidence what Jesus had in mind when He states that He has given believers the glory given to Him by the Father. But I think we can draw some pretty safe conclusions.

Genesis teaches that man was made in the image of God and good (Genesis 1:26, 31). And although man, even after the fall, continues to be the image of God (Genesis 9:6) that image has been defaced by sin. So we see the glorious re-transformation taking place back into that image.

**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).**

Along with this we see the initial glory of the first generation church as God's ambassadors – working miracles and prophetically bringing the message of the New Covenant established by Christ Himself. But also, throughout history, we see the glory of the continual applied work of redemption – proclaiming and enjoying being in covenant with God, accepted by God on account of Christ's finished work... **"the glory which the Father gave to the Redeemer, and he has confirmed it to the redeemed."**<sup>1</sup>

## Unity Between Men

The alienation suffered by man through his rebellion against God also resulted in an alienation suffered between men – like so many ships tethered to the dock by one rope – when that rope is severed the ships not only drift from the dock, they collide with each other and the harbor is transformed from a haven to chaos.

It would appear that the goal in this portion of the prayer is that the unity established between man and God via the finished work of Christ on the cross, also established a unity between man and man. Paul, addressing the inappropriate distinction between Jewish Christian and gentile Christian puts it this way:

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Jn 17:20). Peabody: Hendrickson.

**But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, <sup>15</sup> having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained in ordinances*, so as to create in Himself one new man *from the two, thus making peace* (Ephesians 2:13-15).**

The glory given to the church by Christ animates us to unity. We are one body (Ephesians 1:10), by one Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17), knit together in love and charity. The church is to be unified in judgment and sentiment; disposition and inclination; design and aims; desires and prayers; love and affection. And it is this divine unity found in the church that testifies to an observing world, that they may believe and know that the Father sent the Son and loves His children as He loves His only begotten Son.

### **Good and Bad Diversity**

This leads me back to the topic of diversity and unity. There is a sense in which diversity is a glorious thing. God created diverse (various forms) creatures, plants, stars, planets, sounds, tastes, smells, etc. Within those broader categories there is diversity – male and female, liquid and solid, sweet and bitter, tall and short.

But diversity can also be a monster. Diverse religious practices in the Old Testament (and through human history) lead to human sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21). Diversity in ethics has led to the justification of horrible crimes against humanity (truly against God) all for the supposed greater good. Our recent exposure to diversity in international politics has revealed an utter disregard for innocent civilian life. These things, which have been the norm for history, appear appalling to those raised in a society such as ours with its roots in Judeo-Christian ethics.

Jesus prays for a unity in the church that would reveal to the untethered ships a sure foundation, where, by the grace of God, they may have their ships re-fastened for all eternity. When Israel was to possess the land promised, Moses anticipates the response of the surrounding nations.

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. <sup>6</sup> Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.' <sup>7</sup> "For what great nation *is there* that has God *so* near to it, as the Lord our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)?

### One God, One Law, One Savior

The Israelite was to have unity. One God (Deuteronomy 6:5), One law (Deuteronomy 4:2), One Savior (Isaiah 9:6). As Christians, Jesus prays for us, that we might know the **"one true God" (John 17:3)**. He offers this prayer as our one true Mediator (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24) in His own sanctified blood as man's one true hope (John 14:6; Acts 4:11).

Man formed a unity of ungodliness at Babel – a Christ-less effort to build a man-made structure to heaven. It was a fool's errand and God cursed the efforts by plaguing them with diversity of language and the consequential scattering of the human race.

Diversity in terms of the beauty of creation is a testimony to the creative genius of God. Diversity in the areas of theology and ethics is a testimony to the fall of man. So what is it for which Jesus prays? He prays that the church be an emblem of His glory in the unity of their lives and message.

What is the application of this? How does this prayer find its way into our lives? That we continually avail ourselves of the teaching of the apostles, prophets, (Scriptures) evangelists, pastor and teacher that we all might be edified and equipped for the work of the ministry **"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"** (Ephesians 4:13).

## Questions for Study

1. Discuss how words, terms or ideas must have content to be good or bad (pages 2, 3)?
2. Who is included in the prayer of Jesus (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is the means by which the grace of God comes to people (page 5)?
4. What does Jesus mean when He says He gave Christians His glory (pages 5, 6)?
5. What is a sort of side-effect of the fall of man (pages 6, 7)?
6. How can diversity be good/bad (page 6)?
7. What should the surrounding world see in Christians (page 8)?