



Christ Prays for His Disciples

John 17:11-19

February 20, 2022

Main Idea: In the absence of his presence, Christ prays that his disciples would be kept and sanctified by the Father.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 17:11-19 (IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO READ VERSES 6-10 TOO)

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What is Jesus praying for in this passage? (Make a list of all his requests)
2. What key themes or repeated words do you find in the text?
3. What questions do you have about the text?
4. Is there anything surprising to you in this text?

Explain – What does this mean?

This passage is a continuation of one long prayer in John 17. In verses 1-5, Jesus prays to the Father for his glory. Now he turns his attention to praying for his disciples in verses 6-19.

1. Unity and oneness come up a lot in these chapters, but in particular with Jesus' prayer. Essentially, he is saying "all I have is theirs." List some things you know to be true of the Son and the Father's relationship that are true for all Christians.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Look at John 17:15. What does Jesus pray specifically for? Is that surprising to you? How does this comfort you particularly as you think about the evil that Christians experience at the hands of other people who don't follow Christ?

2. In verse 17, Jesus asks for the Father to sanctify them in the truth and then says "your word is truth." How have you seen the word lead to sanctification in your life? Can you think of a time in your life where you've experienced the sanctifying effect of the word even in the midst of suffering?

Respond – What's my next step?

1. Is there someone in your life who needs this comfort from Jesus? Spend some time praying that God would keep them and sanctify them. Reach out to them with this prayer if you can.

2. If you haven't, memorize John 20:31 and then ask yourself how this purpose verse in John is fulfilled in Jesus' prayer for the disciples.

Commentary

TAKEN FROM THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN BY D.A. CARSON

2. Jesus prays for his disciples (17:6–19)

a. Jesus' grounds for this prayer (17:6–11a)

Jesus has prayed for himself, in particular for his glorification (vv. 1–5). That glorification is integrally bound up with the benefit of all those the Father has given him (v. 2), so it is not surprising that he now turns from his single petition for himself to his several for his disciples. Before beginning them, Jesus advances the grounds for these petitions, *i.e.* the reasons why he is praying for these people as opposed to others, and the reasons why the Father should meet his requests.

17:6. These people for whom Jesus now lifts his voice in prayer are those whom the Father has given to the Son (vv. 2, 6; *cf.* notes on 6:37). This gift was not rooted in anything intrinsic to the people themselves. They were part of the wicked world (*cf.* notes on 1:9), but God gave them to Jesus *out of the world*—apparently functionally equivalent to the fact that Jesus chose them out of the world (15:19). Thus in a profound sense they belonged to God antecedently to Jesus' ministry (*They were yours; you gave them to me*).

To these people, then, Jesus has revealed God's name (NIV fn.). The aorist *ephanērōsa* ('I have revealed', lit. 'I have manifested') doubtless sums up all of Jesus' ministry, including the cross that lies just ahead (*cf.* 4). The revelation of God's name does not seem greatly different from the glorification of God on earth (v. 4); *cf.* Sidebottom, p. 40). God's 'name' embodies his character; to reveal God's name is to make God's character known. It is hard not to detect the hint of a reference to Ex. 3:13–15. Some have thought a particular 'name' of God is in view: 'I am' (8:58; Brown, 2. 755–756); 'I am he' (Dodd, *IFG*, p. 417); 'Father' (Schlatter, pp. 319–320). There is no need to choose. Jesus' disclosure of

the name of God is coincident with his 'narration' of the invisible God (*cf.* notes on 1:18), in fulfillment of the biblical prophecy, 'Therefore my people will know my name' (Is. 52:6).

The ones for whom Jesus prays, then, antecedently belonged to God, who took them out of the world and gave them to his Son, who manifested God's name to them. From the human side, they can be described in terms of their response to God's gracious self-disclosure in Christ Jesus. At one level, Jesus and his teachings were in the public arena; of these people, however, Jesus can testify to his Father, *they have obeyed your word (logos; cf. notes on 1:1; 14:23)*. That the revelation Jesus simultaneously is and delivers can be briefly summed up as *your word* is not surprising, for all of Jesus' words are God's words (5:19–30), and Jesus himself is God's self-expression, God's Word incarnate (1:1, 14). What is initially a little more surprising is that Jesus' disciples, before his cross and resurrection, should be described as those who have obeyed this revelatory word. Jesus keeps God's word (8:55), his commands (15:10), and he encourages his followers to observe *his* word (8:51–52; 14:23) or words (14:24), *his* commands (14:15, 21; 15:10). The failures of the disciples, to which Jesus himself has drawn sharp attention (e.g. 16:31–32), force us to ponder how Jesus can so readily characterize their response as obedience.

Many commentators find in this anomaly strong evidence that the Evangelist has (unwittingly?) slipped into anachronism, describing the competence of the apostles and of other early Christians long after the resurrection. This explanation is intrinsically unlikely, for no Evangelist exceeds John in his care to distinguish what the disciples understood during the ministry of Jesus and what they understood only later (e.g. 2:19–22; *cf.* Carson, 'Mis', for a chart of relevant passages and fairly detailed discussion). Moreover, a good case can be made that when in the Fourth Gospel Jesus refers to his *words* (plural) he is talking about the precepts he lays down, almost equivalent to his 'commands' (*entolai*, as in 14:21; 15:10), but when he refers to his *word* (singular) he is talking about his message as a whole, almost equivalent to 'gospel'. The disciples had not displayed mature conformity to the details of Jesus' teaching, but they had committed themselves unreservedly to Jesus as the Messiah, the one who truly reveals the Father. True, they did not yet enjoy the full understanding that would be theirs after Jesus had risen (2:22) and the Spirit had been given (16:12–15), but John does not claim they did. In this context, the proper comparison is not between the faith-status of the disciples *before* the resurrection and the faith-status of the disciples *after* the resurrection, but between the belief and obedience of the *disciples before* the resurrection and the unbelief and disobedience of the *world before* the resurrection. Judged by those standards—*i.e.* placing them at their proper location in the stream of redemptive history—the first disciples stand out. When other 'disciples' judge that Jesus teaches too many hard things, the Twelve stay with Jesus: 'You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God' (6:68–69). Even where there is risk to life and

health, the closest disciples self-consciously choose to remain with Christ (11:16; 13:37), however flawed their courage might have been. At the fundamental level, Jesus' assessment of his closest followers is entirely realistic, and in no way a contradiction of 16:31–32. After all, despite the generous assessment in 17:6, Jesus goes on to ask the Father to keep them safe (17:11). That they have kept the revelatory 'word' that Jesus has mediated to them from the Father does not mean they have already become 'Christians' in the full post-Pentecostal, Antiochian sense (Acts 11:26). It simply means that, as compared with the world, they have been drawn out of it (v. 6), and constitute the nucleus of what will become the expanding messianic community, the church. Only this interpretation makes sense of the verses that follow.

17:7. Now, at the end of Jesus' ministry and just before his death, the disciples *know* (Jesus prays) *that everything you have given me comes from you*.

The verb *know* reflects the Greek *egnōkan*: assuming the perfect tense is the original reading (cf. Metzger, p. 249), it refers to the state of their knowledge at the time established by the *Now*. They may not have understood that their Messiah had to die and rise again; they may not have grasped how he was to embrace and fulfil in his own person Old Testament motifs of kingship, sacrifice, priesthood and suffering servant. But they had come to the deep conviction that Jesus was God's messenger, that he had been sent by God and that all he taught was God's truth. The strange way of putting the last point—*that everything you have given me comes from you*, which sounds complicated and tautologous compared with, say, 'that everything I have comes from you'—carefully emphasises Jesus' dependence upon his Father (cf. notes on 5:16–30).

17:8. This verse expands further on the themes of v. 7. The phrase 'everything you have given me' (v. 7) is here identified as *the words you gave me*. Here *words* renders the Greek *rhēmata*, neither Jesus' teaching as a whole nor his itemized precepts, but his actual 'words' or his 'utterances'. These were given to Jesus by God; the Son says only what the Father gives him to say. And the disciples *accepted* (*elabon*) these words. They may not always have understood them, but so attached had they become to Jesus that they accepted his words as true revelation from God. Moreover, however strong the predestinarianism in vv. 2, 6, it is important to insist that the disciples accepted Jesus' words, they obeyed Jesus' 'word' (v. 6), they believed that God sent Jesus (v. 8): the accepting, the obedience, the faith is *their* accepting, *their* obedience and *their* faith, regardless of how prevenient God's grace had been in their lives. This, too, becomes part of the ground of Jesus' prayer for them.

The upshot is that the disciples *have come to know* (in this context a better rendering of the aorist *egnōsan* than NIV's 'knew') *with certainty* (*alēthōs*, i.e. 'truly', 'in truth') *that I came from you*; or, otherwise put, *they believed that you sent me*. In this verse there is little distinction between the knowledge and the belief of the disciples (cf. notes on v.3).

17:9. For these disciples, then, Jesus prays (*erōtaō*, lit. 'I ask', here clearly with the sense 'I ask for something': *cf.* notes on 16:23). The Greek word order makes the contrast very sharp: 'not for the world (*cf.* notes on 1:9) I pray, but for those you have given me'. The next words summarize all the grounds adduced so far: *for they are yours*.

The antithesis between the disciples and the world is extremely sharp, but it should not be made absolute. The Father loves the world so much he sends his Son (3:16), who is designated the 'Saviour of the world' (4:42; *cf.* 3:17; 12:47). On the other hand, the distinction between the disciples and the world should not be reduced to the merely utilitarian—as if Jesus restricts himself to praying for his disciples for no other reason than that they are his means for reaching the world. True, their mission is mentioned a few verses later (v. 18), and Jesus can pray for those who will believe in him through their message (v. 20). Even so, the fundamental reason for Jesus' self-imposed restriction as to whom he prays for at this point is not utilitarian or missiological but theological: *they are yours*. However wide is the love of God (3:16), however salvific the stance of Jesus toward the world (12:47), there is a peculiar relationship of love, intimacy, disclosure, obedience, faith, dependence, joy, peace, eschatological blessing and fruitfulness that binds the disciples together and with the Godhead. These themes have dominated the farewell discourse. The world can be prayed for only to the end that some who now belong to it might abandon it and join with others who have been chosen out of the world. There is nothing intrinsic to the 'world' itself, granted what John makes of the world (*cf.* notes on 1:9), that could sanction prayers on its behalf. To pray for the world, the created moral order in active rebellion against God, would be blasphemous; there is no hope for the world. There is hope only for some who now constitute the world but who will cease to be the world and will join those of whom Jesus says *for they are yours*.

17:10. What belongs to the Father, however, belongs no less to the Son, and vice versa: *All I have is yours, and all you have is mine*. The disciples already belonged to the Father when he gave them to the Son: 'they were yours' (v. 6). And because the Father has given them to the Son, they are no less his (vv. 2, 6). However much the reciprocal ownership expressed in v. 10a turns on the gift the Father extends to the Son, it is nevertheless a Christological claim of extraordinary reach (*cf.* notes on 5:19–30).

Perhaps this reciprocity of ownership calls to mind, much as in 5:23, the Father's intention that all should honour the Son. If so, it provides the link to the second half of v. 10: *And glory has come to me through them*. As in v. 6 (*cf.* notes), the extent to which Jesus has been glorified in the lives of his disciples is still pathetically slim compared with what will yet be (*cf.* 13:34–35; 14:13), but it is infinitely better than what he has received from 'the world'. This, too, becomes grounds for his prayer for them.

17:11a. The final reason Jesus advances to ground his prayer for the disciples is the fact that he is about to leave them. As so frequently in chs. 14–17, he describes his passion in terms of his going to the Father (*I am coming to you*).

No longer will Jesus be 'in the world' (*cf.* notes on 1:10). The disciples, aided by the Holy Spirit, will have to face the world's temptations and the world's hostility (15:18–16:4) without the help of his immediate physical presence and protection.

b. Jesus prays that his disciples may be protected (17:11b–16)

17:11b. Jesus' petitions for his disciples are prefaced by *Holy Father*, a form of address found only here in the Fourth Gospel (though *cf.* vv. 1, 5, 25). It was not arbitrarily chosen. Not only does it preserve a view of God that combines awesome transcendence with familial intimacy (*cf.* Mt. 11:25), but, more importantly, it prepares the way for vv. 17–19 and the 'sanctification' or 'consecration' (the underlying Gk. term means 'to make *holy*': *cf.* notes below) of Jesus and of his disciples. The thought, as we shall see, is that the holiness of the Father establishes what it means for the Son and his followers to 'consecrate' themselves—the Johannine equivalent of 'I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy' (Lv. 11:44; *cf.* 1 Pet. 1:16; Mt. 5:48; Barrett, p. 507). The root of Jesus' 'holiness' and of ours is tied up in our respective relationships with the holy Father.

The basic petition could be understood in two ways. Literally translated, it reads 'keep them in your name' (*tērēson autous en tō onomati sou*). If the phrase *en tō onomati sou* ('in your name') is taken to have instrumental force (*i.e.* 'by your name'), modifying *tērēson* ('keep'), the petition means 'protect them by your name' or, more periphrastically as in NIV, *protect them by the power of your name* (so, *e.g.*, Schlatter, p. 321; Bultmann, p. 503; Bruce, p. 332). In favour of this reading is the instrumental power of God's name in some Old Testament passages: 'Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might' (Ps. 54:1). The parallelism shows that God's name may stand not only for the manifestation of God's character, but also for his might (*cf.* also Ps. 20:1; Pr. 18:10). Alternatively, the phrase *en tō onomati sou* ('in your name') may be taken to have locative force ('in your name'), modifying *autous* ('them'). The passage must then be rendered 'keep them in your name', *i.e.* 'keep them in loyalty to you' or 'keep them in full adherence to your character' (so, *e.g.*, Lagrange, p. 445; Lindars, p. 524; Schnackenburg, 3. 180).

It is difficult to be certain which interpretation is right, and Brown (2.759), amongst others, argues for both. But the context rather favours the second interpretation. The next clause, *the name you gave me*, coheres better with the second interpretation than the first. If 'your name' in the disputed clause refers to God's power, then *the name you gave me* must mean, more or less, 'the power you gave me'. That would mean Jesus is asking his Father to protect his followers by using the same power that the Father had already given Jesus. The standard of comparison is the reverse of what one expects in the Fourth Gospel: Jesus is dependent upon his Father, and his power is meted out to him, and measured by, his Father's power (*e.g.* 5:19ff.), not the reverse. Moreover, this

use of 'name' ill accords with its occurrence in vv. 6–8. By contrast, if 'in your name' has locative force and modifies 'them', then God's 'name' has its most common connotation of the revelation of God's character, and *the name you gave me* assumes that God has supremely revealed himself in Jesus. That is not only a dominant theme in this Gospel (1:18; 14:9), but entirely suits vv. 6–8, 'I have revealed *your name* to those whom you gave me out of the world' (*cf.* notes, above).

In short, Jesus prays that God will keep his followers in firm fidelity to the revelation Jesus himself has mediated to them. The purpose of such faithful allegiance, Jesus avers, is *that they may be one as we are one*. Barrett (p. 508) comments that the 'disciples are to be kept by God not as units but as a unity', but that slightly misses the point. They are not kept *as* a unity; rather, their unity is the purpose of their being kept. They cannot be one as Jesus and the Father are one unless they are kept in God's name, *i.e.* in loyal allegiance to his gracious self-disclosure in the person of his Son. A similar pattern prevails in vv. 17–19: persistence in the truth is the prerequisite to participation in Jesus' sanctification. On the nature of the unity, *cf.* notes on v. 21.

17:12. During his ministry Jesus *protected* the disciples and *kept them safe*, not *by* the name God gave him, but *in* the name God gave him (*cf.* 11)—*i.e.* in the revelation of God himself mediated in the person of Jesus. The only exception is Judas Iscariot, and this exception is merely apparent, since Jesus repeatedly indicates not only his awareness of the traitor's schemes, but that his choice of him was antedated by his awareness of what would take place (6:64, 70; 13:10–11, 18, 21–22). Verse 12b makes something of the same point. It establishes that Jesus has been utterly faithful to the task assigned him, *viz.* to keep and protect those that the Father has given him (*cf.* notes on 6:37–38). Jesus' prayer for his disciples, in this context, therefore *excludes* Judas Iscariot, for otherwise one would have to conclude that Jesus failed in the responsibility that had been assigned him.

The delicacy of getting this matter right is what prompts the inclusion of v. 12b. Judas Iscariot's exceptional status is established by two features:

(1) He is called 'the son of perdition' (NASB, and most versions; Gk. *ho huios tēs apōleias*). The expression could refer either to Judas' character (e.g. in Is. 57:4, MT's 'children of unrighteousness' [NIV's 'brood of rebels'] becomes, in the LXX, *tekna apōleias*, 'children of perdition'), or to Judas' destiny (e.g. in Is. 35:4 MT, 'the people I have totally destroyed' becomes, in the LXX, *ton laon tēs apōleias*, 'the people of perdition'). Both are true; probably the latter is dominant in this context. The noun *apōleia* ('perdition') in the New Testament commonly refers to eschatological damnation (Mt. 7:13; Acts 8:20; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Tim. 6:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:7; Rev. 17:8, 11). The full expression found here, *ho huios tēs apōleias* ('the son of perdition') also occurs in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, where it is in apposition to the eschatological 'man of sin' (NIV fn.) who must be revealed before the end. Probably John 17:12 portrays Judas Iscariot as a horrible precursor belonging to the same genus as the

eschatological 'son of perdition', just as in 1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3 John portrays the heretical teachers he there confronts as of a piece with the antichrist.

(2) The reference to the fulfillment of Scripture also assures the reader that the defection of Judas is foreseen by Scripture, and therefore no evidence of a failure on Jesus' part. The Scripture in view is probably Psalm 41:10, applied to Judas in John 13:18 (*cf.* notes), rather than Psalm 109:8 (*cf.* Acts 1:20).

17:13. Although Jesus is saying these things while he is still *in the world*, no one is more aware than he that his departure is imminent (*I am coming to you now*). If *these things* refers to the contents of his prayer (*i.e.* to Jn. 17 alone), then saying *these things* with the purpose of transmitting *the full measure of my joy* to the disciples calls to mind 11:42. There, too, Jesus prays out loud in such a way as to benefit those who heard his praying. This prayer demonstrates the depth of Jesus' communion with his Father, and this constitutes a paradigm for the intimate relationship with the Father that the disciples themselves will come to enjoy. Moreover, after the resurrection the truth of 17:1–5 will be freshly absorbed, and the wonder of who Jesus is will itself give birth to joy. But more probably *these things* refers to the entire farewell discourse. If so, *my joy* points unmistakably to 15:11, where Jesus' joy, like that of the disciples for whom he prays, turns on abiding in the Father's love, which itself turns on obedience to him. This interpretation makes best sense of the passage. Jesus is praying that the disciples may be kept safe, which is equivalent to praying that they may so be preserved that they remain in the Father's love, obedient to him and in hearty allegiance to the 'word' (v. 6) Jesus taught. What is now made clear is that Jesus' concern in such a prayer is not that the statistics on faithfulness be preserved, but that his disciples might share his joy.

17:14. The dangers from which Jesus is asking his Father to protect his disciples are real and urgent. He has given them his 'word', and they obeyed it (*cf.* notes on vv. 6, 8). That word is nothing less than the truth of the revelation of God (v. 17), the knowledge of which is eternal life (v. 3; 20:31). Therefore *the world has hated them* (*emisēsen*; on the aorist tense, *cf.* 4–5). The reason (as in 15:18–16:4a) is that the disciples are now *not of the world any more than I am of the world*. Of course, this does not tie the disciples to Jesus' ontology. They have been chosen out of the world (15:19); Jesus never was of it, and had to enter it (1:10, 14). But for the disciples, the consequence of their having been chosen out of the world, of their having obeyed the word the Father gave Jesus, is that they, like Jesus, are aligned with the Father and his gracious self-disclosure in Christ Jesus. Insofar as they side with this revelation, the disciples infuriate the world. The world loves its own, and the disciples are *not of the world*, but are of God and his revelation. This revelation, in presenting the truth and commanding assent, condemns the world and exposes its evil (3:19–21; 7:7), and the world snarls in savage rage.

17:15–16. If in the light of this conflict Jesus prays for his own, he makes it clear that he is not praying that God would *take them out of the world* (as he himself is about to leave the world) but that God might *protect them from the*

evil one. The last phrase in the original (*ek tou ponērou*) could be taken in an abstract sense ('from evil') or as a reference to the devil. The latter is almost certainly what is meant (cf. Mt. 6:13; 1 Jn. 2:13–14; 3:12; 5:18–19). The death/exaltation of the Master spells the principal defeat of the ruler of this world (12:31; 14:30; 16:11), but that does not rob him of all power to inflict terrible damage on the Lord's followers, if they are left without succour. Until the consummation, when the last enemy is destroyed, 'the whole world is under the control of the evil one' (1 Jn. 5:19). The Christians' task, then, is not to be withdrawn from the world, nor to be confused with the world (hence the reminder of v. 16, repeating the thought of v. 14b), but to remain in the world, maintaining witness to the truth by the help of the Paraclete (15:26–27), and absorbing all the malice that the world can muster, finally protected by the Father himself, in response to the prayer of Jesus.

Doubtless Christians in John's day were forced to ponder the implications of this prayer. So also were those who were contemplating the possibility of becoming Christians. The cosmic, spiritual nature of the conflict is laid bare. The followers of Jesus are permitted neither the luxury of compromise with a 'world' (cf. notes on 1:9) that is intrinsically evil and under the devil's power, nor the safety of disengagement. But if the Christian pilgrimage is inherently perilous, the safety that only God himself can provide is assured, as certainly as the prayers of God's own dear Son will be answered.

c. Jesus prays that his disciples may be sanctified (17:17–19)

17:17. The 'holiness' word-group from which *Sanctify* derives is rather rare in the Fourth Gospel. The verb occurs in 10:36; 17:17, 19; the adjective 'holy' is found in the expression 'Holy Spirit' in 1:33; 14:26; 20:22, and otherwise in 6:69; 17:11. At its most basic level of meaning, 'holy' is almost an adjective for God: he is transcendent, 'other', distinct, separate from his creation, and so the angels cry unceasingly in his presence, 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' (cf. Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). Derivatively, then, people and things that are reserved for him are also called holy—whether a censer for an altar in the temple of the old covenant, or a man set apart to be the high priest. The prophet Jeremiah, and Aaron and his sons, were all 'sanctified', *i.e.* set apart for sacred duty, reserved for God (Je. 1:5; Ex. 28:41). The moral overtones in our English words 'holy' and 'sanctification' emerge only at that point: *i.e.* ideally if someone is set apart for God and God's purposes alone, that person will do only what God wants, and hate all that God hates. That is what it means to be holy, as God is holy (Lv. 11:44–45; 1 Pet. 1:16).

Jesus is the one whom the Father 'set apart [*i.e.* "sanctified"; the verb is *hagiazō*] as his very own and sent into the world' (cf. notes on 10:36). That is, the Father reserved the Son for his own purposes in this mission into the world. Otherwise put, the Son sanctified himself (cf. v. 19, below)—*i.e.* he set himself apart to be and do exactly what the Father assigned him. Now he prays that God will *sanctify* (*hagiazō*) the disciples. In John's Gospel, such 'sanctification'

is always for mission. The mission of the disciples is spelled out in the next verse; the present verse focuses on the *means* of the sanctification: 'Sanctify them *by the truth; your word is truth.*'

This can only mean that the means Jesus expects his Father to use as he sanctifies his Son's followers is *the truth*. The Father will immerse Jesus' followers in the revelation of himself in his Son; he will sanctify them by sending the Paraclete to guide them into all truth (15:13). Jesus' followers will be 'set apart' from the world, reserved for God's service, insofar as they think and live in conformity with the truth, the 'word' of revelation (v. 6) supremely mediated through Christ (himself the truth, 14:6, and the Word incarnate, 1:1, 14)—the revelation now embodied in the pages of this book. In practical terms, no-one can be 'sanctified' or set apart for the Lord's use without learning to think God's thoughts after him, without learning to live in conformity with the 'word' he has graciously given. By contrast, the heart of 'worldliness', of what makes the world the world (1:9), is fundamental suppression or denial of the truth, profound rejection of God's gracious 'word', his self-disclosure in Christ.

17:18. As Jesus was 'sanctified' and sent into the world (10:36), so the purpose of the 'sanctification' of his followers is that they are sent, by Jesus himself, into the world. This is an anticipation of the mission articulated in 20:21, the mission adumbrated in 13:20 and 15:26–27. The aorist tense ('*I have sent* them into the world') is often taken as firm evidence of anachronism, since the commission lies in the future with respect to this point in Jesus' ministry. This judgment is of a piece with the rather mechanical interpretation of the aorist in v. 4–5 (*cf.* notes).

There are four larger theological issues raised by comparing this verse with the broader context of the Fourth Gospel. (1) Comparison with v. 20, where Jesus extends the list of those for whom he is praying, attests that those for whom he prays in vv. 6–19 are primarily his original followers, and therefore that John is maintaining historical specificity, and remarkable freedom from anachronism. (2) Use of the phrase *into the world* for the mission of the disciples shows that there is no *necessary* overtone of incarnation or of invasion from another world. Only the broader descriptions of the coming of the Son 'into the world' betray the ontological gap that forever distances the origins of Jesus' mission from the origins of the disciples' mission. In the immediate context, all the emphasis is on the points of comparison, especially the invasion of the wicked 'world' from a stance that owes everything to God and nothing to the world. (3) That Jesus' prayer for his disciples has as its end their mission to the world demonstrates that this Gospel is not introducing an absolute cleavage between Jesus' followers and the world. Not only were they drawn from the world (15:19), but the prayer that they may be kept safe in the world and sanctified by the truth so as to engage in mission to the world is ample evidence that they are the continuing locus of 3:16: 'God so loved the world that he sent ...' (*cf.* 1 Jn. 4:12). (4) Seekers reading this Gospel are thus introduced to the profound mandate and unique example that animate the

witness of Christians. More, they are thus exposed to the mutually exclusive circles that demand a choice: the circle of the world, in all its rebellion and lostness, and the circle of the disciples of Jesus, in all the privilege of their relationship to the living, self-disclosing, mission-ordaining, sanctifying God.

17:19. As strange as *I sanctify myself* is, at one level it is nothing more than Jesus' determination to co-operate with the Father's sanctification of him (*cf.* notes on 10:36; 17:17). Jesus is as determined to set himself apart for his Father's exclusive service as the Father is to set him apart. Immediately, however, the context cries out with two additional themes.

(1) The sweep of the Fourth Gospel demonstrates that the central purpose of the mission of the Son is his death, resurrection and return to glory. If Jesus consecrates himself to perform the Father's will, he consecrates himself to the sacrifice of the cross—a theme he registers elsewhere (*cf.* notes on 10:17–18; 18:11; 19:30; *cf.* 1:29, 34; 11:49–52). The point is intimated in this verse by the fact that Jesus sanctifies himself *for them* (*hyper autōn*): the language is evocative of atonement passages elsewhere (e.g. Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:19; Jn. 6:51; 1 Cor. 11:24). It is also evocative of Old Testament passages where the sacrificial animal was 'consecrated' or 'set apart' for death—indeed, of language where consecration becomes synonymous with the sacrificial death itself (e.g. Dt. 15:19, 21).

(2) At the same time, the second part of the verse, *that they too may be truly sanctified*, suggests that the sanctification of the believers consequent upon Jesus' sanctification of himself must be something akin to what he undergoes. Here it seems best to find a parallel in the notion of the consecration of prophet or priest to particular service (*cf.* references in the notes on v. 17). Jesus dedicates himself to the task of bringing in God's saving reign, as God's priest (*i.e.* his mediator) and prophet (*i.e.* revealer); but the purpose of this dedication is that his followers may dedicate themselves to the same saving reign, the same mission to the world (v. 18).

Thus in language that applies equally well to the consecration of a sacrifice and the consecration of a priest, Jesus is said to consecrate ('sanctify') himself. His sacrifice cannot be other than acceptable to his Father and efficacious in its effect, since as both victim and priest he who is one with the Father (1:1; 14:9–10) voluntarily sets himself apart to perform his Father's will (*cf.* Heb. 9:14; 10:9–10).

That prepares the way for the next turn in Jesus' prayer, his petitions for those who will believe through their message.



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Sunday School teacher to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you knew God was sustaining and keeping you?

OR

2. If someone asked you how a Christian endures when life is hard what would you tell them?

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 17:11-19 (YOU COULD READ VERSES 6-10 FOR EXTRA CONTEXT TOO)

Highlight – What stands out?

1. What is Jesus praying for in this passage? (Make a list of all his requests)
2. What key themes or repeated words do you find in the text?

Explain – What does this mean?

*For larger groups, the questions that you choose from this section (and the Apply and Respond sections) might be best answered in a smaller group format. You could have people in your group turn to the person next to them (or get in a group of 3-4) and discuss for 5 minutes and then come back together as a group and have one or two groups share. This allows more people to learn from each other, but also promotes active learning in the group.

1. Read verses 11-19 again (preferably out loud). What does this tell you about the heart of Christ for his disciples?

2. Look up the following verses in the Gospels and ask this question: **How does this help explain why Christ would pray for his disciples in this way in John 17?**

- **MATTHEW 26:30-46**
- **MARK 14:26-42**
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3. Look up Luke 22:31-32. What does Jesus predict and what does he promise? Now look at the fruit of his restoration in 1 Peter 5:6-11. How does this fulfill Jesus' prayer in John 17:11-19?

Apply – How do I live this out?

THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO INSERT AN ILLUSTRATION: THIS CAN BE A STORY FROM CHURCH HISTORY, YOUR OWN LIFE, OR FROM SCRIPTURE. THINK PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF HOW CHRIST KEEPS US AND SANCTIFIES US IN THE MIDST OF EVIL.

1. In verse 17, Jesus asks for the Father to sanctify them in the truth and then says "your word is truth." How have you seen the word lead to sanctification in your life? Can you think of a time in your life where you've experienced the sanctifying effect of the word even in the midst of suffering?
2. Consider the context of when Jesus is praying. As a group, try to recall all that Jesus has told the disciples up to this point in John 17. What is to come? What does he expect of them? What does he say he will do for them? How does this comfort you when you experience similar uncertainty?

Respond – What's my next step?

1. Is there someone in your life who needs this comfort from Jesus? Spend some time praying that God would keep them and sanctify them. Reach out to them with this prayer if you can.

Additional Resources:

Sermon: [He Will Hold Me Fast \(performed by Shane and Shane\)](#)

When I fear my faith will fail
Christ will hold me fast
When the tempter would prevail
He will hold me fast
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path
For my love is often cold
He must hold me fast

He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast

Those He saves are His delight
Christ will hold me fast
Precious in His holy sight
He will hold me fast
He'll not let my soul be lost
His promises shall last
Bought by Him at such a cost
He will hold me fast

He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast

For my life He bled and died
Christ will hold me fast
Justice has been satisfied
He will hold me fast
Raised with Him to endless life
He will hold me fast
Till our faith is turned to sight
When he comes at last

He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
He will hold me fast
For my Savior loves me so
He will hold me fast