



Christ Prays for His Own
John 17:20-26
February 27, 2022

Main Idea: Jesus prays for all who trust in him to be united to one another as they are united to him and loved by him.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXT: JOHN 17:20-26

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. Then he turns his attention to praying for his disciples in verses 6-19. Now he prays for all who come after the disciples because of their witness in verses 20-26.

1. What is the focus, source, and goal of the unity Jesus prays for in verses 20-21?
2. He shifts his attention to praying for glory in verses 22-24. Look up John 1:14 and Exodus 33:17-23. How is glory described in Exodus? How is glory described in John 1:14 and John 17:22-24?

3. He closes out this prayer by praying for love in verses 24-26. What is the connection between love and how the world knows God?
4. Skim John 13-16. How is this prayer a summary of these chapters?
5. Think about the entire Gospel up to this point. How is this prayer a summary of the entire Gospel?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. Think about the world we live in today, with all the division and difficulty— what are some things that threaten this unity? How can you pursue unity in your own church or community context because of what Christ has done?
2. Look back at how you answered the glory question in the Explain section. If glory is defined as the display of God's character, what does this mean for you knowing that Jesus says God the Father has given you the same glory he gave the Son? How does this fuel your obedience to him?

3. Why do you think unity, glory, and love are the three things he prays for in this chapter?

4. What is the primary reason Jesus prays for these things? (Hint: He mentions it three times in verses 21, 23, and 25). Now read verse 26 with your name inserted in place of the pronouns. How have you seen this to be true in your life? How have you seen verses 21, 23, and 25 fulfilled because of this?

Respond – What's my next step?

1. Of all the things he mentions in John 13-17, which area of obedience do you need his help with the most? Write a prayer, asking him for the ability to persevere in this area.

Commentary

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

3. Jesus prays for those who will believe (17:20–23)

17:20–21. This extension to those who will believe through the witness of the original disciples assumes that their witness will in some measure prove effective. What Jesus prays for these believers-to-be is *that all of them may be one* (v. 21)—a petition that repeats what Jesus has prayed for his original disciples, a petition whose significance is further unpacked in the remaining clauses of the verse. This is not simply a ‘unity of love’. It is a unity predicated on adherence to the revelation the Father mediated to the first disciples through his Son, the revelation they accepted (vv. 6, 8) and then passed on (‘those who will believe in me *through their message*’, v. 20). It is analogous to the oneness Jesus enjoys with his Father, here fleshed out in the words *just as you are in me and I am in you*. The Father is actually in the Son, so much so that we can be told that it is the Father who is performing the Son’s works (14:10); yet the Son is in the Father, not only in dependence upon and obedience to him, but his agent in creation (1:2–3) and his wholly concurring Son in the redemption and preservation of those the Father has given him (e.g. 6:37–40; 17:6, 19). The Father and the Son are distinguishable (the pre-incarnate Word is ‘with’ God, 1:1; the Son prays to his Father; the Father commissions and sends, while the Son obeys), yet they are one.

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 un-worldly, that their witness as to who Jesus is becomes explainable only if Jesus truly is the revealer whom the Father has sent.

Although the unity envisaged in this chapter is not institutional, this purpose clause at the end of v. 21 shows beyond possibility of doubt that the unity is meant to be observable. It is not achieved by hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator, but by common adherence

to the apostolic gospel, by love that is joyfully self-sacrificing, by undaunted commitment to the shared goals of the mission with which Jesus' followers have been charged, by self-conscious dependence on God himself for life and fruitfulness. It is a unity necessarily present, at least *in nuce*, amongst genuine believers; it is a unity that must be brought to perfection (v. 23).

17:22. The nature of the unity is further unpacked. The *glory* (cf. notes on 1:14) that the Father gave the Son he has transmitted to his followers. Exactly what is meant by these clauses is much disputed. Some tie this glory to that for which Jesus prays in vv. 1, 5, but this makes v. 22 necessarily anachronistic. On the whole, it seems best not to take *them* as a reference to the original disciples alone, but as a reference to all disciples, including those who will (later) believe through the witness of Jesus' first followers. If so, Jesus has given his *glory* to them in the sense that he has brought to completion his revelatory task (if, as in vv. 4–5 and repeatedly throughout the chapter, he may be permitted to speak proleptically and thus include his climactic cross-work). *Glory* commonly refers to the manifestation of God's character or person in a revelatory context; Jesus has mediated the glory of God, personally to his first followers and through them to those who believe on account of their message. And he has done all of this *that they may be one as we are one*.

17:23. Cf. v. 21. Some measure of unity in the disciples is assumed, but Jesus prays that they may *be brought to complete unity*, sharing richly in both the unity of purpose and the wealth of love that tie the Father and the Son together. The purpose, as in v. 21, is *to let the world know that you sent me*, to which is now added the further goal, *that you ... have loved them even as you have loved me*. The thought is breathtakingly extravagant. The unity of the disciples, as it approaches the perfection that is its goal (*teteleiōmenoi*; cf. the use of this verb in 4:34; 5:36; 17:4), serves not only to convince many in the world that Christ is indeed the supreme locus of divine revelation as Christians claim (*that you sent me*), but that Christians themselves have been caught up into the love of the Father for the Son, secure and content and fulfilled because loved by the Almighty himself (cf. Eph. 3:17b–19), with the very same love he reserves for his Son. It is hard to imagine a more compelling evangelistic appeal.

4. Jesus prays that all believers may be perfected so as to see Jesus' glory (17:24–26)

17:24. Jesus frankly expresses his will to the Father (*I want ...*, *thelō*, lit. 'I will'), but of course his will is nothing less than the will of his Father (4:34; 5:30; 6:38). What Jesus wants is *those you have given me* (cf. Additional Note) *to be with me where I am, and to see my glory*. *Those you have given me* includes all the elect, both the original followers and those who would believe on account of their message (cf. v. 2). The 'glory' Jesus wants his disciples to see is (he tells his Father) *the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation*

of the world (lit. 'before the foundation of the world': cf. Mt. 13:35; 25:34; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8)—an unambiguous reference to v. 5, where Jesus prays to be restored to the glory that he had with the Father before the world began. The first witnesses could testify that they had seen Jesus' glory (1:14), as indeed they had, not only in selected 'signs' (e.g. 2:11) but supremely in the cross and resurrection. Even so, they had not witnessed Jesus' glory in its unveiled splendour. Christians from every generation glimpse something of Jesus' glory even now (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18), but one day, when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:2). The glory of Christ that his followers will see is his glory as God, the glory he enjoyed before his mission because of the Father's love for him. The ultimate hope of Jesus' followers thus turns on the love of the Father for the Son, as in 14:31 it turns on the love of the Son for the Father. Presumably those who share, with the Son, the delight of being loved by the Father (v. 23), share also in the glory to which the Son is restored in consequence of his triumphant death/exaltation. We are thus brought back to the futurist eschatology of 14:2–3, while creation and consummation meet in the glory of the Son.

17:25–26. Although it is possible to think of these two verses as a summary of the entire prayer, their connection with v. 24 is perhaps more compelling. They serve to ground the eschatological prospect of v. 24, not only by continuing the theme of the Father's love for the Son, but by emphasizing the continuing manifestation of the Father to the believers, the continuing 'making known' of the Father, in anticipation of the consummating glory.

Jesus addresses God as *Righteous Father* (cf. v. 11) because God is acknowledged to be profoundly righteous in that judgment by which the 'world' (cf. notes on 1:9) is condemned for its ignorance, while Jesus and his followers are accepted. Jesus' mission is not a failure: although *the world does not know you*, Jesus tells his Father, he himself does, and has made God known to his disciples. Jesus knows God intrinsically; because he has in turn made God known to his followers, they have come to recognize that the Father himself sent Jesus. Moreover, Jesus' revelatory work will continue (presumably through the Holy Spirit), so that God's gracious self-disclosure in his Son will not be reduced to a mere datum of history, but will be a lived experience (cf. 14:23). The purpose of this continuing manifestation of God himself is, first, that the love the Father has for the Son (cf. v. 24) may be *in them*—which may mean 'amongst them' (and displayed in their love for one another) or 'within them' (so that as individuals they become loving people). It is impossible to think of one without the other. The crucial point is that this text does not simply make these followers the objects of God's love (as in v. 23), but promises that they will be so transformed, as God is continually made known to them, that God's own love for his Son will become their love. The love with which they learn to love is nothing less than the love amongst the persons of the Godhead (cf. notes on 15:12–17).

The second purpose of Christ's continuing work in making known his Father is (Jesus avers) *that I myself may be in them*—and again *in them* might mean 'amongst them' or 'within them'. Either way, this is nothing less than the fulfillment of the ancient hope that God would dwell in the midst of his people (*cf.* 14:20).

Additional note

17:24. In manuscripts from a compelling diversity of text types, the text literally reads 'what you have given me'. This reading has been 'corrected' in many manuscripts to the formally more coherent 'those you have given me'. English syntax may well demand that this be the translation in any case, but the neuter singular is fairly common in John when the elect are referred to as a group (*e.g.* 6:37; 17:2).¹

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 550–571). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.