



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

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John 17:6-19

December 2, 2007
English Standard Version

“Christ’s Prayer for His Disciples”

This is the 60th sermon in the series on the New Testament book of John entitled,
“The Gospel of Christ.”

John 17:6-19

“I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 Now they know that everything that You have given Me is from You. 8 For I have given them the words that You gave Me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. 9 I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 All Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. 12 While I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

INTRODUCTION: *The Urgent Need of the Church*¹

¹ The introduction is adapted from the sermon, *“If My Words Abide in You”* by John Piper, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN, 1/3/97, www.desiringGod.org and *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, by D.A. Carson, pages 13-16. J.I. Packer quotes comes from his chapter in the book *My Path of Prayer* by David Hanes, ed., page 56.

What is the most urgent need in the church of the Western world today? That's the question that Don Carson poses at the beginning of his book, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*. It's a good question to ask at the beginning of Advent.

What is the most urgent need in the church of the Western world today?

Is it the need for purity in sexual matters, he asks, in a culture obsessed with sex at almost every turn? Is it integrity and generosity in the financial arena where the "raw worship of Mammon has become so bold, so outrageous, so pervasive in the Western world during the last 25 years that many of us are willing to do almost anything — including sacrificing our children — provided we can buy more?"

Is the most urgent need more evangelism and church growth — when careful studies show that the increase in church attendance is accompanied by **no increase** in holiness?

Is the most urgent need disciplined, biblical thinking and strong biblical scholarship, when many students and faculty in seminaries and colleges and universities have an extraordinarily **shallow** knowledge of God, in spite of all their academic work?

Carson does not belittle any of these needs, but says, "There is a sense in which these urgent needs are merely symptomatic of a far more serious lack. The one thing we **most urgently need** in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. **We need to know God better.**"

Then he says that prayer is one of the foundational steps in knowing God—"spiritual, persistent, biblically-minded prayer."

He thinks that we have become so good at **other things** that we have forgotten how to pray: "We have learned how to organize, build institutions, publish books, insert ourselves into the media, develop strategies, and administer programs, but we have forgotten how to pray."

Several years ago at a North American seminary, 50 students planning to go overseas in ministry for the summer were interviewed for their suitability. Only three — out of 50 — could testify to regular quiet times of reading the Bible and devoting themselves to prayer. We assume that pastors and missionaries are the models — I am afraid we would be shocked.

J.I. Packer wrote about his own pilgrimage in prayer and commented, "I believe that prayer is the measure of the man, spiritually, in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as important a question as we can ever face"

Carson's aim in his book is to see our prayer life transformed and, through that, **our experiential knowledge of God deepened**.

He realizes that the main reforming power is the Word of God.

There is good biblical reason for this approach. It's the same biblical reason we find in **John 15:7** where Jesus said to His disciples, "*If you abide in Me, and **My words abide in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*"

The church has been debating with the world for hundreds of years. And it's apparent that there's lots of people who **don't believe** our argument that Christianity can **change** their life. But when they see someone whose life has been changed because they've placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then they are confronted with an unanswerable argument that Christ does, in fact, change lives.

But if our lives **haven't** been changed, or our life, or our lifestyle, **doesn't** demonstrate change, if there is **no** discernable difference between how we live, how we think, how we talk, how we treat others ... then those other people **aren't** being confronted with much of an argument for Christ at all ... are they?

In fact, the **lack** of a changed life is an effective argument **against** putting your faith in Christ. And I believe that one of the main reasons so many people who profess faith in Christ,

but **don't** live in accordance with their profession, is because they spend so little time **getting to know Jesus**.

And so, as we come to this passage today — Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 — I want you to keep asking yourself this question, **“Is my life an argument for or against having faith in Jesus Christ?”**

We start by seeing that ...

v. 6-10: JESUS IDENTIFIES WITH HIS DISCIPLES ²

When we start reading John 17 we notice one thing right away. This is really “the Lord’s Prayer.” That prayer that He taught us to say is better called “the Disciple’s Prayer.” After all, it’s the prayer that Jesus taught to His **disciples**.

But now we see the prayer that Jesus Himself prays. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and soon He’ll be returning to God the Father by way of a desperately shameful and painful death. And with the shadow of the cross hanging over Him, Jesus does two things in His prayer. And the first thing is that He identifies with His disciples before God the Father. And He identifies with them ...

- **By Their OBEDIENCE**

Jesus says in verse 6, *“I have manifested Your name to the people whom You gave Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You gave them to Me, and they have **kept** Your word.”*

It’s important to realize that the followers of Christ were obedient men. Their obedience to Christ stood out compared to the disobedience of the world. They were **God’s men**. They had been chosen for the important work of establishing Christ’s Church on earth and it was only through obedience, only through **keeping God’s Word**, that they would be able to carry this out.

And so ... when you ask yourself, “Is my life an argument for or against Christ?” you need to consider the issue of obedience to God’s Word. Does your obedience stand out compared to the disobedience of the world? Does your obedience to God’s Word enable you to work in and for Christ’s Church?

Romans 8:34 says that *“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”* Jesus is still coming before God the Father on our behalf. Is He able to say about you, “Father, I can identify with My disciple down there at Potomac Hills in Leesburg. You gave her to Me and **she** has obeyed Your word. You gave him to Me and he has **obeyed** Your word.”

Jesus identifies with those disciples who keep God’s word. He also identifies with His disciples ...

- **By Their KNOWLEDGE**

Jesus says here in verse 7, *“Now they **know** that everything that You have given Me is from You.”* Back in verse 3, He said, **John 17:3**, *“And this is eternal life, that they **know** You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

You see, there’s no eternal life apart from personal knowledge of Jesus Christ, as Rich taught last week. It’s not enough to know **about** Jesus, you must **know** Jesus as you know your friends.

I don’t know Billy Graham. I know **about** Billy Graham, but I don’t **know** him. I’ve never sat down and talked with him, I’ve never shared my life with him, I’ve never prayed with

² The Exposition of the text is adapted from my sermon “*What Jesus wants for you,*” 2/14/93; *Reflections on the Gospel of John, Vol. 4* by Leon Morris, pages 573-590; *The Gospel According to John* by D.A. Carson, pages 550-567; *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus* by D.A. Carson, pages 183-194; *Preaching the Word: John* by R. Kent Hughes, pages 399-405; *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!* (The Bible Speaks Today) by Bruce Milne, pages 243ff.

him. And yet there are people in the church today who are under this illusion that they can know Christ without having a relationship with Him. They never talk with Him, they never share their life with Him, they never pray, they never listen to what He has to tell them.

It just doesn't work that way. To know God, to really know God, is a transforming experience. If we come to know God, we can never be the same old sinful people we used to be. To know God is life. Knowledge of God, knowledge gained through relationship, doesn't bring life — **it is life**.

Obedience, Knowledge, and third, Jesus identifies with His disciples ...

- **By Their RECEPTION**

In verse 8, Jesus says, *“For I have given them the words that You gave Me, and they have **received** them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.”*

The disciples may not have always understood God's Word, but they had become so attached to Jesus that they received His words as the true revelation from God. And once they received them, they worked to fully understand them.

And yet, so many times today we do things just the opposite. We insist on being able to **fully understand** a passage of Scripture **before** we'll accept it. And we certainly won't obey it; we won't do what it says, until **after** we're sure that we understand it **completely**.

Yet the disciples accepted God's Word from Jesus **because they first accepted Jesus**. Once that relationship with Christ had been established, then they were free to accept what Jesus said. If you don't have that kind of relationship with Christ ... if you aren't accepting the words that Jesus said ... then there's no way you can be obedient to that Word. Obedience depends on having a relationship with Christ and accepting what He said. “Is my life an argument for or against having faith in Jesus Christ?”

And ultimately it boils down to one thing. What is Jesus looking for from you? What does Jesus give you that most enables Him to identify with His people? He wants to identify with His disciples ...

- **By Their BELIEF**

Jesus goes on to say, again in verse 8, that *“For I have given them the words that You gave Me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have **believed** that You sent Me.”*

Jesus identified with His disciples because of the **belief** the disciples placed in Him. A belief that Ephesians 2 tells us is a gift from God. After all, isn't that the bottom line? Do you, or do you not, believe in Jesus Christ? Do you believe that Jesus actually did what the Bible says He did? Do you believe that Jesus actually said the things that the Bible records He said? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you have life in His name?

There is no obedience, no knowledge, no relationship, no reception, no acceptance ... **without faith, without belief**. Ultimately this is how Jesus will identify His disciples. “Father, these are My disciples. Look at them and see their faith.” Jesus identifies with His disciples by their obedience, by their knowledge, by the reception of His word, and **by faith**.

Therefore, the question is, “Does Jesus identify with you?” Is my life an argument for or against having **faith** in Jesus Christ?

And if Jesus identifies with you as one of His followers, what is He doing ... today ... to be bringing about change in your life? Well, this passage is telling us that **He's doing** what He wants **us** to do. Which means that ...

v. 11-19: JESUS INTERCEDES FOR HIS DISCIPLES

Once Jesus has identified with His disciples before God the Father, then He intercedes for them. He goes before the Lord in prayer on behalf of His followers.

And first, He prays ...

- **For Their PROTECTION**

You see, once you've sided with Jesus, then you've also sided against the world. Once you've declared that you're going to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, you're telling the world that you're no longer going to follow their ways. In a very real sense, you've made a "Declaration of War."

I was talking with someone this week about this, and said something to the effect of, "When we commit to Christ, when we commit to prayer, when we commit to being in the word of God, **we're declaring war against Satan**." And that thought has come back to me again and again since then. I think that anytime we side with God as opposed to the world ... we're declaring war. Anytime we side with God as opposed to the flesh ... we're declaring war. Anytime we side with God as opposed to the devil ... we're declaring war. When we gather together on Sunday morning to worship God, we're declaring to the world that "Our God Reigns!" Beloved, to the world, that's a declaration of **war!**

And if we're going into battle, then we'll need some protection. And nothing less than the armor of God and the power of God will be adequate for the fight. Jesus understands all this far better than you or I ever will and so He prays to the Father for our protection.

Verse 11, "*Holy Father, **keep** them in Your name.*"

Verse 12, "*I **kept** them in Your name ... I have **guarded** them.*"

Verse 15, "***keep** them from the evil one.*"

Second, Jesus prays ...

- **For Their UNITY**

Jesus prays, verse 11, "*that they may be one, even as We are one.*" Jesus prays that we'll be protected from disunity. Nothing will defeat an army so quickly as when you're able to divide their forces. Break off their communications. Interrupt their supply lines. Use deception to distract them. Oh, Satan knew military tactics long before the U.S. Army learned them. Unity is the first thing to be challenged. The first battlefield of the church. Therefore, Jesus prays that we'll be protected from division, that we'll be protected from our failures to communicate, that we'll be protected from our own inability to be supplied from God's Word, that we'll be protected from deception and distraction.

This is no small request. I think Jesus knew what was coming. I think Jesus knew that we would have churches breaking fellowship over the sacraments, over baptism, over doctrine. When I was interviewed for my first pastoral job, one of the very first questions I was ever asked was ... "Will you split the church?" And I answered, a little too quickly, "Of course not." But then I had to go back to the question a little later and apologize. And then I said, "There are two things I will split this church over: The authority of God's Word and the person and work of Jesus Christ." Some things are worth dividing over. Some things are worth fighting for. Some doctrines are too precious to let them go quietly.

But I also think that Jesus knew that we would have churches breaking fellowship over what color to paint the bathrooms, over what color carpets to buy, over what type of curtains to hang, over stupid, silly nonsense that has nothing to do with making disciples.

I know of two churches that were going to merge but couldn't agree on how to say the Lord's Prayer, so they called it off. And the local paper reported that one church remained in their debts while the other church stayed with their trespasses. And the paper was right.

But look at what Jesus is praying for here. He's praying that we'll have the same kind of

unity **that He has with the Father**. When we look at the state of the church today, this is a prayer that should make us think long and hard about what we're doing to keep the unity that Christ gives us. Maybe we need to ask ourselves, "Is our church an argument for or against having faith in Jesus Christ?"

Third, Jesus prays ...

- **For Their JOY**

The Lord prays that we'll be protected from a lack of joy. He asks God, verse 13, "*that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*" He's not asking God to give us some half-hearted lame smile, but life-changing abundant joy. He wants us to have His joy, and not only that, but that His joy would be **fulfilled** in them. Jesus prays that we might be so overflowing with joy that the world can only sit up and take notice. That despite our circumstances, despite our difficult situations, despite our occasional failures — when it comes to joy, the church is the only game in town. "Is our church an argument for or against having faith in Jesus Christ?" And last, but not least, Jesus prays ...

- **For Their HOLINESS**

And Jesus prays for our holiness. He asks God, verse 19, "*that they also may be sanctified in truth.*" To be sanctified, to be made holy, to be set apart ... is to be reserved for God. Sanctified people are people who've been set apart for service to God. When someone's set apart for God and for God's purposes, then that person will be doing the things that please God. And at some basic level, that's what it means to be holy, as God is holy.

Jesus prays that we would be protected from unholiness. Holiness is motivated by our unity and joy as Christians. When there's no unity, when there's no joy, there's probably not much holiness in our lives either.

We may impress ourselves by the difficulties we face, the challenges we tackle, by our inability to do the things we would like to do, so we think that we have pretty good excuses for lacking unity, joy, and holiness. But we need to keep in mind that God knows all about that, He knows what we're facing; He's still put us where we are. He wouldn't put us in a situation where unity was impossible, where joy was impossible, where holiness was impossible. Because if we're followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, then He has identified with us, and He's interceding for us. He is with us ... and we are with Him.

And nothing is impossible for God.

Therefore, we have to ask ... What are ...

APPLICATION: JESUS INTENTIONS FOR HIS DISCIPLES ³

What does Jesus want for us? What are His intentions for His church today? Might they be related to things that allow Him to identify with us? Things like obedience, knowledge, acceptance, and belief? Might they be related to things that He thought were so important that He brought them before God in prayer? Things like unity, joy, and holiness?

Vernon Grounds was a great Christian leader and past President of Denver Seminary. He once said that when reading books which exhorted him to live the Christian life, he often found himself, after reading a particularly good point, to write in the margin of the book the letters He once said that when reading books which exhorted him to live the Christian life, he often found himself, after reading a particularly good point, to write in the margin of the book the letters **YBH**.

³ The Vernon Grounds story comes from *The Practice of Godliness* by Jerry Bridges, page 151. This book, along with his companion book, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, comprise two of the best basic books on sanctification and spiritual growth available.

And one time a friend noticed that a lot of his books had these letters, **YBH**, written over and over again in the margins. So the friend finally asked Vernon, “Why do you write the letters **YBH** in the margins of your books and what do they mean? Vernon looked at his friend and replied, “**Yes, But How?**”

Jesus prays that we might be sanctified ... be made holy. Vernon Grounds would not have to write **YBH (Yes, But How?)** in the margin of John 17. Because in verse 17, Jesus asks God to “*Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*”

Sanctification, the process of being made holy, comes through what we call ... the means of grace. And while there are many, the means of grace generally refer to The Word of God, Prayer, and the Sacraments. And there is no shortcut. If we’re going to live the Christian life ... if our lives and our church is going to be an argument **for** having faith in Jesus Christ and not **against** having faith in Jesus Christ, then we’re going to have to be known as people of the Book.

You may have sought and tried to obtain instant holiness. There’s no such thing. We want somebody to give us three easy steps to holiness, and we’ll take them next Friday and we’ll be holy by Sunday. The trouble is, holiness doesn’t come that way. The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16**, a verse that all of us should memorize, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” The last item he mentions is “*training in righteousness.*” That’s what the Scriptures, the Word of God, the Word of Truth, the Holy Bible, will do for you if you use it. You need a disciplined intake of God’s Word if you’re going to live a life of holiness.

You must hear the Word as taught from the pulpit and in Sunday School. It’s going to be difficult to live the Christian life if you’re not in church on Sunday. And if you’re not attending Sunday School regularly, you’re simply punishing yourself. You need to hear the Word regularly. You must read the Word for yourself. It’s going to be difficult to live the Christian life if you’re not spending time reading God’s Word. Reading the Scripture gives us the overall perspective of God’s Truth, while study of a specific passage enables us to dig more deeply into a particular truth.

You know the definition of a habit is “a behavior acquired by frequent repetition.” We need to develop habits of holiness. They won’t come overnight, but only by frequent repetition. Being a person of the Book is going to require that you hear the Word, that you read the Word, and that you study the Word.

Jesus didn’t ask God to send us out into the world to merely survive, but to thrive. To thrive as His followers ... as His disciples. As the Apostle Paul wrote in **Philippians 2:14-16**, “*Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life...*”

And then, if we really are going to be people of the Book, then maybe we won’t have to worry so much about the question, “Is my life an argument for or against having faith in Jesus Christ.”

Think about that.

You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I’ll close.

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