

The Real Lord's Prayer

John 17

Introduction

I invite you today, into the prayer closet of Jesus Christ. We will listen as God the Son talks to God the Father. He prays a prayer that is so packed with great truths that we can, as William Barclay said, “grasp only fragments of them.”

It is the last lengthy discussion between Father and Son, just hours prior to the crucifixion. Certainly, the prayer of anyone who is about to die is worthy to be listened to with a sense of awe.

Let us turn, in our study of John's gospel, to chapter 17. This is a chapter which, in the words of one writer, is called, “the holy of holies” within the gospel of John. We will slip quietly in to listen and try to grasp some of the fragments. And, I trust, we will be forever changed because of it.

Notice verse 1.

These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee,”

Now, before we dive in head first, we need to notice a profound truth that is easy to overlook – the prayer begins with the word, “Father”! Understand that, nowhere, not in the Old Testament or in any other document prior to Jesus Christ coming to earth, does any individual Israelite ever address God as “Father”.

By the time of Jesus, the name of God, or “Yahweh” (four Hebrew consonants – “yod,” “heh,” “vav,” “heh”), was considered so sacred that ordinary people were not even supposed to know it, much less to speak it. That name, “Yahweh,” was so sacred that it was never pronounced except by the High Priest when he went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. When the Jewish copyists were copying the Old Testament scriptures and came to that name in the text, they would stop, wash their hands, select a new quill, write the name, discard the quill, and then continue with their work.

Now there were many names for God – “Elohim” or Creator, “Jehovah” or Redeemer, “Jehovah Jireh,” “Jehovah Sabaoth” – but look at verse 6.

I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word.

Jesus is saying, “I've revealed Your name to my disciples . . .”.

Now, while you could substitute the word “nature” for “name,” and Jesus certainly revealed the nature of the Father to the world, I believe He is referring to this new name, which no Jew had ever before dared to consider in relation to a awesome, holy God – the name of “Father”.

The name “Father” is used by Jesus fifty three times in chapters 14 through 17 alone. Every time Jesus prayed to God, He called Him “Father”. More than one hundred twenty times, in the gospel of John, does Jesus reveal this breathtaking, unimaginable relationship. The only time Jesus ever prayed that He did not refer to God as “Father” was when He hung on the cross and cried, “. . . My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

He did not call Him “Father” then. Why? Because it was at that moment that Jesus became our sin, which caused intimacy with the Father to be broken. Otherwise, for Him, His intimate relationship was expressed by the name “Father”.

Four Special Requests

Now, if you were about to die, what would you pray about? As we listen in on this conversation between God the Son and God the Father, we will discover something very interesting – He is praying for you and me.

Jesus Christ is passionate that you and I experience a few things and, in this last recorded lengthy prayer, He makes at least four special requests. I want to suggest four words, four passionate desires of our Lord, for those He prayed for.

Prayer Request #1 – Intimacy with our Father

1. The first prayer request is for intimacy with our Father. Christ prays that you and I might

experience the intimacy with our heavenly Father that He experiences with the Father!

Go back to chapter 17, and look at verses 1b through 3.

Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

Now, I have to tell you, there is something special about being prayed for and hearing the prayer. When my family prays and my wife mentions me and prays for me, it does something for me. And, like the other night, as my little girl prayed, “Lord, please help Daddy with his sermon,” – you do not know what that does for me.

I want to remind you that He is praying for you! You could take your pencil and write your name all through this chapter, as I did:

- verse 3a – “And this is eternal life, that Stephen may know Thee . . .”
- verse 8 – “for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to Stephen; and Stephen received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and Stephen believed that Thou didst send Me.”
- verse 11a – “And I am no more in the world; and yet Stephen himself is in the world, and I come to Thee, Holy Father, keep Stephen in Thy name . . .”

Write your name throughout this chapter! He is praying for you! Imagine that! He is praying for me . . . He is praying for you!

And what is He praying for? First, He is praying that you will be intimate with the Father.

Go back to verse 3. This verse provides the definition of eternal life.

And this is eternal life, . . .

Are you ready for the definition?

. . . that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

The Father is viewed throughout the New Testament as the “fountain of divinity” – the head of the triune God. To refer to the Father is to refer to the divine counsel and will of the triune God.

Jesus has already made it clear that He and the Father are equally divine, yet the Son came to represent and fulfill the will of the Father – the predetermined counsel of the divine will. He is no less deity for obeying His Father’s will than I was less human when I obeyed my earthly Father’s will.

So, to come to know the Father is to come to know the triune God, and you cannot come to know God unless you have come to know Jesus Christ.

Now, back to this interesting definition, “. . . this is eternal life . . .”.

This phrase is often understood only in terms of duration. If you ask the average Christian, “What is eternal life?” – they will answer, “It’s life that never ends; it goes on and on and on and on.”

Oh no! Eternal life is not just about duration – even the wicked will live forever. The key word in this definition is the little word “know,” – “. . . this is eternal life, that they may know Thee . . .”!

Look at verses 25 and 26a.

O righteous Father, although the world has not known Thee, yet I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou didst send Me; and I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known

John chapter 17 begins and ends with the same passion for intimacy with the Father.

Now, there are two different Greek words that are translated “know”. One is the word “ginosko,” which means, “to know by experience or relationship”. It is the word used for such intimate knowledge between a husband and wife that finds expression in physical union; as in, “He knew her.” It is a word that refers to knowledge by total openness, close association, and deep friendship.

The other word is “oida,” which means, “to know by the acquisition of cold hard facts”.

Which word do you think Jesus is referring to?

Now there is nothing wrong with “oida,” or knowledge of God by way of propositional truth and fact. I spent ten years of my life in Bible college and in seminaries to study the facts about God. I can discuss the ontological equality of God and the economic subordination of function within the Godhead. I have a theological grid; an orthodoxy that serves as a filter for experiences. Christian pulpits today lack this grid, while they pursue a multitude of experiences. We are racing toward disaster with

experience behind the wheel. You can acquire *facts* about God – without ever developing a *relationship* with God.

So, the word Jesus selects, in verse 3, is the word “ginosko”. He says, “This is eternal life; this is really living – to know the Father, by close association; by deep friendship; by total openness.”

Eternal life is now! It is not just duration – it is relationship!!

Malcomb Forbes, a man who had a publishing empire, was a billionaire. He owned property around the world – castles in France and such. His annual party was a televised event for the elite and popular. On his personal jumbo jet, he would take a planeload of friends to other parts of the world on a whim. He became known to me as I read articles in the newspaper or heard about him on the news. One statement he made however, summed the emptiness of this unbeliever’s life. He once said, “He who dies with the most toys, wins.”

He said, in other words, “Life is not relationship – life is possessions; things!”

A few weeks ago, Marsha and I were in Austin, Texas for a conference. One of the speakers we heard worked closely with the counseling organization of Minirth and Meir. He made this fascinating statement, “I can’t be one hundred percent sure about this, but I’m coming to believe that kids who didn’t have a father to play with, can grow up to become people obsessed with toys.”

Is it possible that the American obsession with cars and boats, toys and clothes, clubs and parties, and trips could be the result of people vainly trying to fill a void that was created by their father who never took time to play hoops or hopscotch, to pitch a ball or bait a fishing hook, or to play Barbies?

The solution is not to go back and bait a hook, by the way. In fact, for many of you, your father is no longer alive. The solution is timeless – if you want to really enjoy living; if you want to enjoy and experience eternal life now; if you want to cast off the American obsession with things and stuff, you can – by developing a relationship with your heavenly Father.

John writes in his first epistle, chapter 5, verse 20,
And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true . . . this is . . . eternal life.

Life is not having the biggest, the best, the most expensive, the newest, the prettiest, the strongest – life is knowing the Father! And Jesus prays, “Father, I want them to know Thee intimately.”

Prayer Request #2 – Security of our salvation

2. The second prayer request concerns the security of our salvation.

Verses 9 and 10 record,

I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.

Now, the first error to overcome is to think that, since Jesus is praying exclusively for His disciples, He must then, not have any concern for the world. The fact of the matter is that Jesus must have concern for the world or He would not be found praying for his followers to be witnesses to the world.

The point is, Jesus prays for our protection and security, which is a prayer that certainly cannot be prayed for the world because they are not of Him.

Go on to verses 11 and 12.

And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the sons of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Now, someone might look at Judas and say, “Aha! Jesus was not capable of bringing all His sheep home safely.”

In these verses, the Lord makes it perfectly clear that Judas was never one of His own. He was not a man who was saved, but then lost His salvation – he was a man who pretended masterfully to be a disciple, but, in the end, sold his Teacher for the price of a slave.

Jesus is turning over the guardianship of His chosen ones to the Father. He is placing us in the Father’s hands. And no one who belongs to Jesus Christ will be lost!

I like the way Stanley put it in his book, *Eternal Security*. He wrote,

If Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, and yet we can somehow become unsaved – and therefore undo what Christ came to do – wouldn't it be wiser for God to take us home to heaven the moment we are saved in order to insure we make it? Isn't it really risky to force us to stay here?

Yes, it is risky, *IF* our security is in our hands, based on our faithfulness. Yes, it is risky, *IF* God could somehow fail His word.

Look again at verse 11b.

. . . Holy Father, keep them in THY NAME .

..

Juan Ortiz spoke of a conversation with a circus trapeze artist. The performer admitted that the net underneath was there to keep them from breaking their necks, but added,

The net also keeps us from falling. Imagine there is no net. We would be so nervous that we would be more likely to miss and fall. If there wasn't a net, we would not dare to do some of the things we do. But because there's a net, we dare to make two turns, and once I made three turns - thanks to the net!"

Ortiz makes this observation,

We have security in God. When we are sure in His arms, we dare to attempt big things for God. We dare to be holy. We dare to be obedient. We dare, because we know the eternal arms of God will hold us whenever we fall.

Some like to talk about the perseverance of the saints; I like to talk about the perseverance of the Savior!

Now I know there are some who do not like the idea of eternal security because they believe the doctrine leads to license and sin. To say that eternal security is going to lead to license and sin is like saying that just because we have health insurance, we are going to play with loaded guns or drink hydrochloric acid – “I've got insurance!”

In fact, the very next prayer request deals with the matter of personal holiness and separation.

Prayer Request #3 – Purity in our world

3. In light of our security, Jesus now prays for our purity in our world.

Look at verses 15 through 17.

I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.

The word “sanctify,” in verse 17, is the Greek word “hagiasmos”. It means, “to set apart for holy service”. It cannot mean sinless perfection, otherwise, how could Jesus say, in verse 19a,

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself . . .

The point is, just as Jesus was separated for service, so the believer is separated for service. We are in the world, but not like the world.

Jesus is praying that the believer will have contact with the world without being contaminated by the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, one of the primary reasons we are not winning the world is because we are not providing any different way of life! As Howard Hendricks was fond of saying, “The more like the world you become, the less you will impact it for Jesus Christ.”

Now, the issue of personal “hagiosmos,” or separation, is a difficult subject. It not only deals with black and white issues that are clearly spelled out in scripture, but gray areas as well, where each believer must determine choices.

Seven principles to help determine right from wrong

Douglas MaGlaukin, in a recent publication, offered an insightful help in this area. He gave seven principles that can serve as a guide for the believer in determining right from wrong – in areas which the Bible never addresses. How can I be in contact with my world, without being contaminated by the world, so that I might win the world?

Principle #1 - Expediency

1. Principle number one is expediency.

That is, while it is possible for Christians to spend time and energy on a number of things, as you build your system of values and priorities, never let the

permissible become the enemy of the essential. As Paul wrote in Philippians, chapter 1, verse 10a,

. . . approve the things that are excellent . . .

That which is good may not be that which is best.

Principle #2 - Enslavement

2. Principle number two is enslavement.

There is the thought of being brought under the power of something; that is, to be mastered by a habit or activity is to be enslaved. Paul wrote, in I Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 12b,

. . . All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

Principle #3 - Enrichment

3. Principle number three is enrichment.

This is the positive side of separation. In I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 23, Paul declared,

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.

Paul says, in effect, there are a lot of things you can do, but the criteria is not whether you are breaking one of God's laws, but whether it is serving to edify your walk with Him.

I happen to believe that the greatest enemy to your personal enrichment is television. Surveys reveal that the average American watches television over four hours every day – aimlessly, mindlessly wandering from channel to channel. The principle of enrichment could revolutionize your life! Imagine what you could do with that extra fifteen to twenty hours a week! Think of the letters you could write, the conversations you could have, the walks you could take, the ministry you could get involved in!

Principle #4 - Exaltation

4. Principle number four is exaltation.

Paul continues in I Corinthians, chapter 10, to say, in verse 31,

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Every Christian should live with the fact that God's reputation is at stake in our behavior. Our goal should not be to see how much we can get away with,

but to see what we can do to exalt His name and character.

Principle #5 - Endangerment

5. Principle number five is endangerment.

In chapter 8 of I Corinthians, Paul writes, in verse 13,

. . . if food causes my brother to stumble . . .

(that is, if it causes his faith to be crushed)

. . . I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

The principle is that you and I are responsible for the protective care of younger and weaker Christians. Maturing Christians, who take seriously their responsibilities to those who are watching, will avoid anything in their lives which might cause others to stumble and fall. Rather than taking your brother to edge of the cliff and showing him how close he can get before falling off, you will desire to protect him by your own lifestyle of purity and integrity.

Principle #6 - Entanglement

6. Principle number six is entanglement.

Look at verses 4 and 5 of II Timothy, chapter 2, as Paul wrote to his young spiritual son, Timothy.

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.

Some of you are so caught up in your career pursuit that you have no time to serve Jesus Christ. At best, you carve out an hour to come to morning worship. Paul would say, "You are entangled."

Some of you are here, but your mind is on the latest stock prices listed in the Sunday morning paper.

Your mind is constantly swept up in the building of your financial kingdom on earth. Paul would say, "You are entangled."

Principle #7 - Equivocation

7. Finally, principle number seven is equivocation.

To “equivocate,” means, “to hesitate between two opinions; to be unsure, doubtful, or uncertain”.

Listen to Paul, in Romans 14, verses 22 and 23. This is the classic passage on eating and drinking things offered to idols – a context that no longer exists today, but the principle surely does.

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

In other words, in issues that the Bible does not directly address, if you are not sure what God would have you do, do not do anything!

Paul uses a word that has all but disappeared from the evangelical vocabulary in verse 22 – he refers to your own “convictions”.

Do you have convictions?

- Businessman – that your expense accounts will be honestly reported?
- Young lady – that you will only date Christian men?
- Young man – that you will protect the purity of your date?
- Married couple – that your marriage is for life?

James Boice told of hearing the vows read at a wedding. It was a wedding of two unbelievers who conveniently rewrote the traditional vows to read, “We will cherish one another as long as love shall last,” instead of “life shall last”.

Jesus Christ is praying that you will live a sanctified life – one that is set apart for holiness, distinctive in witness, effective in ministry. “Oh Father, I pray You will make them pure by Thy word!”

Peter Marshall was the chaplain of the United States Senate, as well as the pastor of a downtown Washington church that was packed to the rafters to hear this Scotsman preach. He died at a young age. His wife, Catherine, went on to become a well known author. Her novel *Christy*, was turned into a dramatic television series. She said that after Peter unexpectedly died, she realized that life is not measured by duration, but by donation. It does not matter how long a person lives, but how a person lives.

Every sanctified, purified life will make a donation!

Finally, Jesus goes on to ask the Father for a fourth critical prayer request.

Prayer Request #4 – Unity in our church

4. The fourth prayer request is for unity in our church.

Notice John, chapter 17, verses 20 and 21.

I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.

The prayer is for unity, not uniformity. We are called by God to reproduce, not duplicate ourselves.

This unity is based on truth. Verse 17 declared first, the necessity of truth. Then, to those who adhere to the truth of God’s Word, there can be unity.

When many people see the word “unity,” they think immediately, “Oh, we should get all the denominations together and present a unified front to the world.”

The trouble is, many churches and denominations do not believe the truth about Jesus Christ – *and purity of truth precedes unity.*

I have an article from the secular magazine *Newsweek*, dated August 1993, which headlined an exposé on the mainline Protestant denominations of our day. It stated,

The mightiest Protestants are running out of money, members and meaning!

The author goes on to reveal the lack of theological integrity based on the scriptures and how that is the fundamental reason mainline denominationalism is losing ground.

If you do not stand for anything – who cares?!

So, to just get all the denominations together will not accomplish anything. I like the way Erwin Lutzer, of Moody Church, put it, “Getting several cemeteries together will never produce a resurrection.”

Jesus Christ based our unity on the truth of His deity, His resurrection, His word holding primary authority, His return, a literal heaven and hell, etc.

The trouble is, those of us who believe all of that still find it easier to be disunited than united.

Operation World recently covered the Ukraine – and the fact that the church is facing serious threats. Freedom has brought about some serious problems. Part of the problem is that, under communist persecution, many Christians were bribed and blackmailed to become informers. This has left a deep problem in how the faithful Christians should handle those who bowed, compromised, collaborated, or even joined the persecutors. Is the church going to model forgiveness for the world to see?

In the first century, the first challenge of the church was whether they would forgive Saul of Tarsus and allow him in!

What does the church mirror to the world? Does it reflect factions, fighting, competition, and pride – or forgiveness, compassion, honesty, and truth, which equals unity and is for the sake of winning the world?!

Look at verse 23.

I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, . . .

(that is, into a unit)

. . . that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.

Jesus asks the Father, “Oh Father, make the church, worldwide and this local church, unified – make them a unit – that they may win the world.”

One more thing – Jesus makes his last request. It is in verse 24a and will come as quite a surprise to you.

Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me . . .

Imagine that! Jesus said, earlier, that He was returning to the Father’s house. He now says, in this prayer, “Father, what I really desire is that my disciples be with me in Your house.”

We pray to live longer on earth – Jesus prays that we be with Him in heaven. We want to stay here – Jesus wants us up there! Amazing!

Well, we will slip out of this sacred prayer chamber now. We have been privileged to hear the Savior whisper his deepest desires to the Father. He has prayed for you and for me. And, what are His requests? And, what are our privileges?

- Intimacy with our Father,
- Security of our salvation,
- Purity in our world, and
- Unity in our church.