

II. COMMENTARY

The Lord's Prayer

***MAIN IDEA:** One of Jesus' current ministries in heaven is to pray for us, and we may sometimes wonder what he says. Certainly there would be some difference between his current advocacy and what we find in this chapter, but John provided some general clues about matters that concern the Lord about the life of believers on earth.*

A. Relationship of the Father to the Son ([17:1–5](#))

***SUPPORTING IDEA:** Jesus, the model “finisher,” asked the Father twice to have his glory returned (vv. [1](#), [5](#)). Right at the beginning of this prayer we learn that the Father's glory is the foundational purpose in praying.*

[17:1](#). We have talked often in these studies about John's key words. In this chapter the words *they*, *them*, or *those* appear no fewer than nineteen times. These pronouns generally refer either to the world or to the disciples. The prayer begins by establishing the Sonship of our Lord. In the Old Testament, God was the Almighty One, the Sovereign, but rarely the Father. But this new covenant truth appears frequently in the Gospel of John.

There was no question that God loved his people and cared for them through the ages, but approachability was another matter. The pattern was fixed—God appeared through the priest and the high priest, who were confined to a certain place and time. But now earth had become the visited planet, and God moved among people in the person of his Son. No longer would there be a veil, but a family relationship between God the Father and his children—a relationship exemplified by Jesus the Son.

Verse [1](#) shows us how specifically Jesus prayed. It begins with a petition: **Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.** Throughout the entire prayer Christ made only two requests for himself, and we find both of these in this first section of the chapter. G. Campbell Morgan observes, “The deepest passion of the heart of Jesus was not the saving of men, but the glory of God; and then the saving of men, because that is for the glory of God” (Morgan, p. [270](#)).

[17:2](#). In the Father-Son relationship of this passage, we also see the sovereignty of our Lord: **authority over all people.** This is the same word (*exousian*) found in the Great Commission when Matthew recorded Jesus' words about having received all authority from the Father. We do not often use the word *glorification*, but the New Testament applies it to Jesus in order to describe a fuller manifestation of his true nature that would become more acute at the time of the resurrection and ascension.

We should note that the Lord did not request power. Jesus did not take on sovereignty and omnipotence after the ascension. These eternal qualities he possessed then and he still possesses today as a member of the eternal Godhead. The result of this **authority over all people** and the major purpose of its exercise by the Son centers in eternal life for those designated to receive it. The entire prayer keys to this central idea of eternal life, since that is the result of the glorification of Christ in the lives of people. The Father gives Christ believers. This fact is emphasized no fewer than seven times in this chapter (vv. [2](#), [6](#), [9](#), [11–12](#), [24](#)).

[17:3](#). We also see here the salvation of our Lord in what has become a major New Testament text on the theology of redemption. What is eternal life? Knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. John recalled these words (which he probably overheard) in his first epistle: “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” ([1 John 5:11–12](#)).

For hundreds of years people have tried to know God without coming through the only door or walking the narrow way. But the Bible offers no access to the Father except through the Son. Any theology of God that leaves out Jesus Christ borders on idolatry ([1 John 5:20–21](#)).

Christ’s definition of eternal life is important because it differs from the current concept of endless existence. The word **know** in verse [3](#) is *ginosko*, emphasizing an experiential relationship rather than just necessary information. The verb also appears here in the present tense, suggesting a continuing personal experience and contact with both the Father and the Son. Tenney writes, “However fully man lives in the world, he ultimately reaches the point where nothing is new because he has reached human limits. Only the knowledge of God can give enduring satisfaction, because God alone is eternal. Contact with God will provide the fullest experience, and the experience of God’s eternal being will be eternal life” (Tenney, pp. [245–46](#)).

[17:4–5](#). The fourth segment of this first paragraph teaches us about the status of our Lord. Jesus’ earthly ministry had now finished. Indeed, he would announce that from the cross. Here again we have the second petition, identical to the first—Jesus’ only request of the Father regarding himself. He wanted to return home to claim again his status as the prince of heaven. Jesus had always been “about his Father’s business.” Now that earthly business was drawing to a close.

This was not some work Jesus constructed for himself but the completion of obedience to God’s plan. Soon he would reassume the independent exercise of his divine attributes. “The hour,” which he had so frequently said had not yet come, had now arrived.

We dare not miss the practical application of this paragraph while relishing the splendor of its theology. Jesus set a model for finishing tasks God gives us to do. Think of pastors leaving churches before their work is finished. Think of missionaries returning from the field before God’s actual release. Think of the many times you and I have started some task for the Lord with great enthusiasm only to abandon it—unfinished—in the busyness of our lives.

But what specifically is the **glory** spoken of in this passage? Dods emphasizes that it is a **glory** “not of position only, but of character—a glory which disposed and prepared him to sympathize with suffering and to give himself to the actual needs of men” (Dods, vol. 2, p. 253). The humiliation of death in humanity is, for the Lord, glorification. What we would consider the end of life, Jesus considered return to the reality of eternal life. Christian praying depends on Jesus’ relationship to the Father. Through him we have access to the Almighty God of the universe—a fact established by his own words in this prayer.

B. Relationship of the Son to Believers ([17:6–12](#))

***SUPPORTING IDEA:** Believers are described as those who have obedience, faith, and knowledge. Yet the Lord felt a need to pray for two more gifts of God’s grace for us: Protection in the world and unity among ourselves.*

[17:6–7](#). The theology of this high priestly prayer continues. Now the crescendo of plural pronouns bounces off the walls of our text with a penetrating, sometimes even confusing echo.

The rich theology of the prayer also escalates. Perhaps we can best approach the paragraph by asking two questions: What does Christ do for believers? And what should be our response?

We start the answer to the first question with the word *proclamation*. The disciples heard about God and his plan from the Son. Most sons probably reflect their fathers, perhaps in facial features, height, hair color, personality, and sometimes even worldview. Jesus specifically identified his task in the world as one of revelation to a select group of people chosen by the Father.

The verb **revealed** is the Greek word *phaneroe*, which appears forty-nine times in the New Testament, almost half from the pen of John. Jesus referred to the incarnation here. John is the unchallenged New Testament exegete of the truth that God took human form to communicate with the world. The first act of the Son in drawing disciples unto himself in the vibrant relationship of new life was to tell them and show them what the Father is like. Believers are gifts from the Father to the Son. All people belong to the Father by creation, but those who trust in the Son and relate to him by faith become God's children by redemption.

17:8. By this time in the Gospel of John, we know that Jesus spoke only what his Father had told him. He can describe his own teaching ministry by saying, **I gave them the words you gave me.** Hardly a surprising close to a ministry that had always been described by Jesus as originating with the Father in heaven.

In this verse the Lord also talked about edification. When Paul stayed three years with the Ephesians declaring God's truth, he followed the example of Jesus who did the same thing with these disciples ([Acts 20:17–21](#)). Here we encounter John's interesting contrast of the Greek terms for *word* and *words*. There must have been an obvious intent on John's part to distinguish between *word* and *words* with a special focus on the singular to emphasize the unity of the message.

17:9–10. The Lord also spoke of intercession. Verse **9** contains the curious phrase, **I am not praying for the world.** We should not infer here that the Lord never prayed for the world. This particular prayer focuses on those believers **you have given me** and emphasizes again the reality of the Bible's teaching on election. I believe in election and free will because I think the Bible teaches both. The fact that I cannot harmonize them in my finite human mind does not trouble me.

The switch to the present tense is an important notification of the Lord's on-going ministry. One paraphrase of this verse says, "And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me with everything else of yours, and so they are my glory!" (v. **10**, TLB). What a stunning reality! Faltering, failing, sinning human beings represent the glory of the holy Son of God!

17:11. Jesus brought before the Father the fact that his people would be staying in the world after he left. The word **world** occurs eighteen times in this prayer. This is a strong testimony to the importance of the context of our life and ministry. The address **Holy Father** is unique here in the New Testament. The NIV Study Bible says, "The name suggests both remoteness and nearness; God is both awe-inspiring and loving."

But what did Jesus mean by **the name you gave me**? F. F. Bruce observes, "The name of God in the OT denotes not only his character (as in verse **6** above), but also his power ... By the Father's power, imparted to Jesus, Jesus himself had guarded them as a treasure entrusted to him by the Father, and now he gives account of this stewardship" (Bruce, p. 332).

The prayer for unity appears again in verse [21](#), and we will deal with it there. Suffice it to say here that the text talks about the spiritual unity of the body rather than any kind of organizational or structural relationship.

[17:12](#). In this verse Jesus spoke of protection. The disciple band was still intact with one exception: Judas fulfilled the Scripture by his treason.

But we asked two questions earlier, and the second centers in how believers then and now respond to what the Lord does for them. In virtually every case, Jesus included that in his prayer. When he offered proclamation, the disciples responded with obedience; when he offered edification, the disciples grew in knowledge until he could say to the Father, “Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you” (v. [7](#)). When he offered intercession, they responded in faith; and when He offered protection, they responded in unity. How the church of today could benefit by focusing on [John 17:11](#): “So that they may be one as we are one.”

The keeping ministry of believers is the act of a Holy God in contrast with a sinful world. Of all those who are genuine disciples, **none has been lost**. Only Judas who never had a relationship in the first place was not **kept ... by that name you gave me**. The play on cognate words in the original text is most striking: “Not one perished but the son of perishing.”

C. Relationship of Believers to the World ([17:13–19](#))

***SUPPORTING IDEA:** In these verses Jesus used several prepositional phrases in requesting that the Father watch over Christ’s people who must stay in the world though they are not of the world. He wanted us as his followers to be kept from evil so we can be witnesses to the world.*

[17:13](#). Monasticism, the cloistering of people into private compounds where they have no contact with outside society, is a human invention, not a godly design. Jesus had been **in the world**, and now his disciples would remain **in the world**. They were learning about the Father so they could handle being in the world and still enjoy **the full measure of my joy within them**.

This section of the prayer contains some of the most difficult and negative aspects of the continuing life of believers on earth. But it begins by expressing the reality of joy in their lives. If the disciples heard this part of the prayer (and many scholars believe they listened to the entire prayer), they may have remembered the words of the Lord spoken earlier that evening: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” ([15:11](#)).

Godet picks up on the word **say** (*laleo*) and suggests that the Lord actually told us he was speaking these words aloud “in the presence of His disciples, before leaving them, [so] that He may associate them in the joy which He Himself enjoys. This joy is that which is inspired in Him by the certainty of the protection with which the Father shelters Him at all times, a certainty to become theirs” (Godet, II, p. 335).

[17:14](#). Twice Jesus uttered these exact words, the first instance in the middle of verse [14](#) and the other at the beginning of verse [16](#): **not of the world**. The antipathy between the Word of God and the world of humanity takes center stage in this verse. He had already told the disciples about the world’s hatred ([15:18–21](#)), and now he reminded the Father of the antagonism they would face in the world.

Language like this reminds us of the Hans Christian Anderson story about the ugly duckling whose appearance and behavior was obnoxious to pond-bound ducks among whom it spent the early part of its life. The persecution and pain it endured from others in its limited environment made life miserable until it finally realized its nature was not that of a duck but a swan.

Since swans were unwelcome creatures in duckland, one day it flapped its wings and flew away. In closing the story, Anderson tells us, “Before it knew how all this happened, it found itself in a great garden, where the trees smelled sweet and bent their long green branches down to the channel that wound past. Oh, here it was so beautiful, such a gladness of spring!” Eventually Christians too will go to the land where others possessing the same nature of Christ will gather in joy. But for now, it is clear from our Lord’s prayer that we had better learn to live and minister in the duckland of this world.

[17:15–17](#). How is it possible to be “in the world” and yet not **of the world**? These verses answer that question. Whatever the biblical doctrine of separation might mean, it certainly does not mean isolation. In the early Middle Ages when the world began to corrupt the purity of the church, some saw monasticism as the only solution. It was apparent to them that one could maintain purity of life and a clear relationship to God only by hiding from the world behind ten-foot walls. Some believers even became lone hermits living in the hills until communal monasticism became more popular.

One could never derive such a view from [John 17](#). Jesus prayed not for removal from the world but for an awareness of its evils so they could be avoided. The danger is not the general presence of evil but **the evil one**. The New Testament indicates that the world is in the ultimate control of the prince of the power of the air who does battle against the living God by affecting the lives of his people. The antidote is sanctification. The Greek word for **sanctify** is *hagiazō*, which means “to set apart for God’s use.” As Bruce points out:

This involves their consecration for the task now entrusted to them; it involves further their inward purification and endowment with all the spiritual resources necessary for carrying out that task. This purification and endowment are the work of the Spirit, but here Jesus declares the instrument of that work to be “the truth”—the truth embodied in the Father’s “word” which Jesus had given to the disciples as he himself had received it from the Father (vv. [8](#), [14](#)). The very message which they are to proclaim in his name will exercise its sanctifying effect on them: that message is the continuation of his message, just as their mission in the world is the extension of his mission (Bruce, p. 334).

[17:18–19](#). From the very first days of Christianity, true believers have practiced separation by infiltration. The Father sent the Son into the world and now the Son was sending the believers into the world. Here the Lord introduced the word *sanctify* in different verb forms. In effect, he said, “Lead these disciples to an act of dedication as I have dedicated myself to your work. Then as they live their lives for you, Father, they will ultimately enjoy the fixed and final dedication you bestow upon them.”

In the midst of modern conveniences and sophisticated technology, the church finds it more and more difficult to live in the world without being of the world. We find it increasingly tricky to escape the snares of the evil one and the enchanting attractions of our own flesh and the world around us. Calvin once put it this way: “As the wantonness of our flesh ever itches to dare more than God commands, let us learn that our zeal will turn out badly whenever we dare to undertake anything beyond God’s Word.”

John probably remembered these words of our Lord when he wrote his epistle some years later. To all believers everywhere he issued a ringing admonition: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” ([1 John 2:15](#)). Worldliness is more an attitude than an act; it has to do not so much with what we do as why we do it.

Perhaps the contrast to separation by *isolation* is separation by *infiltration*. The disciples were able to go **into the world** because they were not of the world. Some interpreters suggest that the reason Jesus said “I am not praying for the world” in verse [9](#) was because the battle plan which he would suggest in his prayer just a few minutes later would be the ministry of his disciples in the world: “In order that I may reach the world, I am not for the moment praying for the world, but for those through whom I am going to reach the world.”

D. Relationship of Believers to the Father ([17:20–26](#))

***SUPPORTING IDEA:** Mentioned earlier, this fourth relationship now becomes the main theme. Unity in the church is to be patterned after the unity of the triune Godhead so the world can see how believers dwell in the Lord and he in the Father.*

[17:20–21](#). If we had any doubt that this prayer applies to believers today, it is erased by verse [20](#). The heart of this final paragraph of the chapter focuses on unity—the ultimate demonstration of God’s work through his people in the world. We learn here that body unity is patterned after divine unity. The absolute oneness of the Father and the Son will now be spiritually transferred to believers for a specific purpose—spiritual unity.

The union of the church is not patterned after some earthly organization or any well-meaning intentions of humanity. God joins our spirits through the Holy Spirit because Jesus’ blood is “thicker than water” and thicker than human bonds.

Some interpreters consider this verse to be a pivotal point separating those words specifically related to the disciples from words now spoken to the universal church. Certainly the implication of the verse goes beyond its actual words.

Perhaps there is no verse in all of Scripture which has been more frequently quoted to support ecclesiastical church union than [John 17:21](#). However, the emphasis of the prayer centers in spiritual unity, not organizational unity. It must be understood in the light of [John 10:30](#), “I and my Father are one.” If we are to understand the unity of the church, we must first understand unity between the Son and the Father.

[17:22](#). Christian unity is facilitated by **glory**, first given to Christ and then in turn to the disciples. **Glory** (*doxa*) in this context is not an absolute attribute of God but a relative possession that can be reassigned to believers. Some interpreters see heaven here, but there would be no point in such a futuristic view with respect to the mission statement of verse [23](#): “to let the world know that you sent me.” Peter wrote that the divine nature was already in us as a result of regeneration, so we already have a measure of the glory of Jesus himself.

A former ministry companion of mine, now in the ultimate glory of heaven, once wrote, “Child of God, don’t you know only you share the glow. It’s a light from within, when the blood covers sin. It’s the wonderful glory of God.”

[17:23](#). We also learn in this passage that body unity is a witness to the world. Like a set of matched mixing bowls, we are the smaller one that fits into Christ who fits into the Father. Purpose? **To let the world know that you sent me.** Mixing bowls may provide too mundane a metaphor here, but Jesus’ teaching about the vine and the branches in chapter [15](#) is affirmed by this prayer of chapter [17](#).

The unity of believers calls forth a recognition of God’s hand by observers in the world even while the church is on earth. Just a few hours before this prayer, Jesus told the disciples, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” ([13:35](#)).

[17:24](#). Furthermore, body unity will be complete only in heaven. If the disciples listened to this prayer (which I believe they did), they may have remembered Jesus' teaching from chapter [14](#) as he promised them they would eventually arrive at the place where he was going. He wanted them to see him there. They had seen him scorned and hated on earth. Soon they would see him killed and buried. But they had never seen the splendor of heaven and his role as the Son of the Father.

We see just a touch of humanity in this verse. Just as we invite our friends home to show them how hard we have worked to make it attractive and comfortable, so Jesus looked forward to the time when all his people would be in his Father's house.

What a reminder that our Lord was always a pilgrim and stranger on earth. Now he prayed for guests to visit his eternal home. Notice also that heaven is heaven because of the presence of the Savior, not because of any other physical or material accoutrements.

The glory of verse [24](#) seems different than what we saw in verse [22](#). Here believers observe it but do not partake in it personally, so we focus now on an attribute of deity. The glory and splendor that belong to Christ in heaven are a gift from his Father. This gift was motivated by love that the Father had before the foundation of the world. Before Adam, the Father loved the Son. This love will continue throughout all eternity so that believers may see its effects in the heavenly position afforded the Messiah.

[17:25–26](#). Again we find the contrast between the world and disciples we saw in verses [9](#), [14](#), [16](#). The words **Righteous Father** in reference to God appear only here in the New Testament. They appeal to the justice of God. The world will be excluded from final glory because it has rejected the only means of grace. But the disciples, and all believers, live life with a divine viewpoint because they have known the incarnate God.

The exegesis of the Father that occupied Christ's ministry is both complete and continuous. Complete in the sense that the incarnation demonstrated what God was like to those who would listen. Continuous in that it will go on as long as the world lasts. The impact of the latter part of the verse suggests that the very person of Christ lives in us. Through that inseparable union, we are recipients of divine love. The church of Jesus Christ dare not let the pagan society preempt its keynote theme of love. The love of God in the Son and consequently in the church marks Christians and enables them to reflect and communicate God's love.

As White expressed it, "The situation, then, is perilous; the world antagonistic and unbelieving; the future dark for Master and men: all this is accepted without resentment, without fear. Jesus goes forward; his men, soon to be scattered and shaken, will also in time go forward, imbued with the Spirit, united in loyalty, sure of God's love in Christ, with a gleam of glory in their hearts, and aware of the unfailing presence of the living Christ among them. In them, and upon us, the Lord's own prayer is being constantly fulfilled" (White, p. 132).

***MAIN IDEA REVIEW:** One of Jesus' current ministries in heaven is to pray for us, and we may sometimes wonder what he says. Certainly there would be some difference between his current advocacy and what we find in this chapter, but John provided some general clues about matters that concern the Lord about the life of believers on earth.*

Gangel, Kenneth O. *John*. Vol. 4. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000. Print. Holman New Testament Commentary.

Page 7. Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 8:59 PM November 1, 2018.

Jesus Concludes His Time Alone with His Disciples by Praying to His Father (17:1–26)

This chapter contains the most extensive and profound prayer of Jesus we have. When Jesus prayed at Lazarus's tomb he made it clear that he had no need of expressing prayer because he is one with God in his whole life, the union true prayer expresses. Nevertheless, he prayed for the benefit of those present (11:41–42), and the same is true here as well (17:13). Jesus' whole life has been a revelation of the Father, based on Jesus' union with him, so it is appropriate that his teaching concludes in the form of prayer, the genre most closely associated with union with God. Other farewell discourses also conclude with prayers (for example, *4 Ezra* 8:19b–36; Beasley-Murray 1987:293), but in Jesus' case prayer is itself related to the essence of his message.

As Jesus turns to address the Father his speech implies that he is taken up into the eternal presence (cf. Brown 1970:747). He speaks as if his work were already complete (for example, v. 4). Indeed, he even says, "I am no longer in this world" (v. 11, completely obscured in the NIV). But right after that he says, *I say these things while I am still in the world* (v. 13). He is right there with his disciples just before his death, but he is praying from the realm of eternity. Just as the book of Revelation reveals from a heavenly perspective the certainty of God's unfolding will, so this prayer of Jesus shows that he is completely confident in the outworking of that will.

Jesus' intercession for his disciples from within God's presence anticipates his role after his ascension (cf. 1 Jn 2:1). Because this intercession corresponds to the role of the high priest elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25–26) and because Jesus uses sacrificial language when he refers to sanctifying himself (17:19), this prayer has been known as the High Priestly Prayer. In the fifth century Cyril of Alexandria saw these two activities as fitting for the one who is "our great and all-holy High Priest" (*In John* 11.8).

This chapter completes the chiasm of the farewell discourse spelled out in 13:31–35, with a return to the glory mentioned in 13:31–32 (see comment on 13:31). This passage concentrates on the relation of the Father and the Son and the glory they share. The Father is seen as the one who "gives" (used thirteen times of the Father in this chapter), highlighting his grace and his role as source of all. Jesus focuses specifically on the Father's gift to the Son of disciples. The Son continues to show himself to be the revealer sent from the Father, but he is seen also as a giver—he gives his disciples the Father's word, glory and eternal life.

This prayer gathers many of the key themes found throughout the Gospel. Indeed, "almost every verse contains echoes" (Dodd 1953:417). The Son's work in the disciples is developed through the themes of faith, knowledge, love, indwelling, oneness and God's name. There is also an emphasis on the world, including its separation from God, God's love for it and the disciples' mission to it.

As with much of the farewell discourse, this material is complex and can be outlined in several ways (cf. Brown 1970:748–51; Beasley-Murray 1987:295–96). Jesus begins with a petition for the glorification of the Father and the Son (vv. 1–5), after which he prays for the disciples gathered around him, first describing their situation (vv. 6–11) and then praying that they be protected and sanctified by God (vv. 11–19). Jesus then prays for all who will become believers through the witness of the eleven, that they may share in the divine oneness (vv. 20–24). He concludes with a summary of his past and future work (vv. 25–26).

Jesus Prays for the Glorification of the Father and the Son (17:1–5) Jesus begins his prayer where his keynote address began, with the relationship between the Father and the Son

(5:19–23). The oneness-yet-distinctness continues here as Jesus “lifts up his eyes toward heaven” (v. 1, obscured in the NIV) to the Father who is distinct from him and to whom he is obedient.

In his prayer Jesus will speak of the past and the future from an eternal perspective, but it is all grounded in the present, at this particular climactic point in salvation history: *Father, the time* [“hour,” *hōra*] *has come* (v. 1). This hour has cast its shadow over the whole story (2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20), and its arrival has already been signaled (12:23), with its implications for glory (12:27–28), judgment (12:31–32) and Jesus’ return to the Father (13:1). Jesus now addresses the theme of glory, asking the Father to glorify the Son so that the Son may glorify the Father (v. 1). Thus, even in asking on behalf of himself his ultimate goal and delight is the Father. In general, to glorify someone means to hold him or her up for honor and praise. So on one level the Son is asking that his own honor be revealed, namely, that he is one with God; Jesus in turn will glorify the Father as he continues to reveal him as one worthy of all praise and worship. In John, however, glorification also has a more specific meaning: the death of the Son of God. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has revealed the Father’s glory by manifesting his characteristic gracious love. In the death of the Son this same love is revealed most profoundly, for God is love, and love is the laying down of one’s life (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16; 3:16). Thus, in his death Jesus will reveal his own character and his Father’s character to be gracious love.

In verse 2 Jesus expands this request for glorification, though following his exact train of thought requires careful attention. According to the NIV, Jesus’ request for his glorification is grounded on (*for*) the *authority* that the Father already gave him over *all people* (*pasēs sarkos*, “all flesh”). But *for* (*kathōs*) could also be translated “just as,” indicating that the previous granting of authority is not the grounds for the glorification, but, rather, comparable to the glorification. We will soon see reason to prefer this alternative.

What *authority* is Jesus referring to? Earlier in the Gospel Jesus spoke of his *authority* from the Father to give life and to judge (5:20–27). Now he is speaking of the role the Father gave the Son as agent of creation. While “all flesh” commonly means “all people,” the expression can also mean “all life on earth” (for example, Gen 7:15–16, 21; Alford 1980:875), which would be in keeping with the Son’s being the one through whom “all things were made” (1:3).

The last part of verse 2 refers to the Son’s giving *eternal life to all those you have given to him*.^{*} The NIV takes this as the purpose (*that*) of the Father’s granting Jesus *authority over all people*. This is possible grammatically, but it does not do justice to the distinctions between the two halves of the verse. It is better to take the second half of verse 2 as parallel to *that your Son may glorify you* in verse 1. In other words, the Son will glorify the Father through giving eternal life to those the Father gives him. And the Father’s glorification of the Son is in keeping with his having given him authority over all flesh.

Thus, the flow is from creation to new creation. In both cases the Father is the ultimate source, and the Son is God’s agent. The Son has given life to all creation, and now it is time for him to give eternal life to those within creation given him by God. As with the Son, so with the disciples—the Father is their source (cf. 6:37, 39; 10:29; 17:6; 18:9). He gives them to the Son, and the Son gives them eternal life. The Father acts while they are still dead (cf. Eph 2:1–10); all

* **17:2** The second use of *all* is the word *pan*, a neuter singular. This form has the effect of stressing the group as a whole, a significant nuance in the light of the emphasis on unity later in the chapter. This word is set alongside the masculine plural pronoun *autois*, which reflects the individuals of which this group is composed. So verse 2b reads, “that he might give eternal life to them (*autois*), namely, the whole group (*pan*) that you have given him.”

is of his grace. Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility have been stressed throughout this Gospel, but there is never any doubt that all depends on the Father's grace. "In the contrast between *all flesh* and *whatsoever thou hast given* is expressed the inevitable tragedy of the mercy of God; it is offered to all, but received by the few, and those the elect" (Hoskyns 1940b:590; cf. H. C. G. Moule 1908:32–36).

Jesus pauses to reflect on the meaning of the term *eternal life* (v. 3). This verse is commonly viewed as a parenthetical statement added by John, like a footnote (Barrett 1978:503). But it flows quite naturally even when understood as Jesus' comment on what he has just said, much as verses 6–8 will comment on verse 4. Jesus' reference to himself in the third person seems strange, but the Old Testament contains examples (e.g., 2 Sam 7:20). The phrase *only true God* is not attributed to Jesus elsewhere, but it is similar to John's own language (1 Jn 5:20). Likewise, nowhere else does Jesus refer to himself as *Jesus Christ*, but this expression is very common outside the Gospels. Indeed, this double reference to the one true God and to Jesus is similar to texts in Paul contrasting the Christian faith with pagan polytheism and idolatry (1 Thess 1:9–10; 1 Cor 8:6). So the language probably comes from a later date (though cf. Mt 11:27). Most scholars today would say the thought itself is from the later church, but this begs the question of Jesus' identity and how much of the later church's understanding derives from Jesus himself (cf. C. F. D. Moule 1977). B. F. Westcott is probably closer to the truth when he says John is giving "in conventional language (so to speak) the substance of what the Lord said probably at greater length" (1908:2:244). Such is the case throughout this Gospel.

The Son's ultimate mission is to give eternal life, that is, knowledge of the Father and the Son (v. 3). "The notion that knowledge of God is essential to life (salvation) is common to Hebrew and Hellenistic thought," though knowledge does not mean the same thing in every source (Barrett 1978:503). For John, this knowledge is closely associated with faith (which enables the appropriation of eternal life; 6:47; 20:31) and includes correct intellectual understanding, moral alignment through obedience and the intimacy of union (cf. Dodd 1953:151–69). That is, it refers to shared life, and because it is the life of God that is shared it is eternal life. *Eternal* (*aiōnios*) means unending or timeless, but it refers to not just the quantity but also a certain quality of life. In Hebrew *eternal life* is literally "life of eternity, age" (*ḥayyê 'ôlām*, Dan 12:2), a expression used in contrast to temporal life and also in the contrast between this age and the age to come. Indeed, the word *eternal* is related to the word "age" (*aiōn*). This association with the age to come is most significant in John. For in Jewish thought, life in the age to come is characterized by a restored relationship with God, and that is precisely what Jesus speaks of here. The life of the age to come is already present in Jesus and made available to his disciples, and at the heart of it is an intimate relation with God. "The only life is participation in God, and we do this by knowing God and enjoying his goodness" (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.20.5).

This stress on knowledge sounds Gnostic. In a sense it is, and early Christians believed they had the true knowledge, as opposed to that which is "falsely called knowledge" (*tēs pseudōnymou gnōseōs*, 1 Tim 6:20). Clement of Alexandria (died in A.D. 220), for example, constantly referred to Christians as the true gnostics, and his view of knowledge at core was very much in keeping with our verse. While some of the language and thought of this Gospel is similar to Gnosticism in its various forms (for which see Rudolph 1992), the fact that this knowledge comes through the historical deeds of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, that it is grounded in faith, that it is available already now within history and that it is not concerned with self-knowledge and cosmic speculation sets it off from Gnosticism itself (cf. Schmitz and Schütz

1976:403–5). Any revealed religion will be gnostic—the issue is whether the knowledge claimed is true or false.

The statement in verse 3 is also strikingly similar in form to the central affirmation of Islam, “There is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet.” Both religions claim to honor the *only true God*, a theme from the Old Testament as well (e.g., Ex 34:6 LXX; Isa 37:20), and both speak of the great revealer of God. But they differ radically in what is said of this revealer. Jesus *is* a prophet—indeed, the revealer of God par excellence. But this verse, in keeping with the whole of this Gospel, says Jesus is far more than just a prophet. For eternal life is not just a knowledge of God as revealed by the Son; it includes a knowledge of the Son himself. Thus he shares in deity, since “the knowledge of God *and a creature* could not be eternal life” (Alford 1980:875). This amazing statement, therefore, affirms both the equality of the Son with the Father and his subordination as son and as the one sent.

Jesus has prayed that he might glorify God in the future, but now he speaks of the glorification of the Father he has already accomplished in his ministry (v. 4). His work is not complete before his death (10:18; 19:28, 30), but he says, “I glorified [*edoxasa*, aorist] you on earth, having completed [*teleiōsas*, aorist] the work....” The NIV translation is grammatically possible, but it misses the eternal, confident perspective evident in Jesus’ statement that his work is already over. The glorification of the Father has been the distinguishing feature of his life throughout the Gospel, a glory characterized by grace and truth (1:14). The work was given to him by the Father. So the character of the works revealed the character of him who gave them to the Son to do, and in this way the words and deeds of Jesus revealed the Father’s glory. But also in the Son’s obedience itself is seen the glory of God, since his humility, obedience and sacrifice reflect the love that is the laying down of one’s life.

Having prayed for the glorification of the cross and its provision of life (vv. 1–2) and having mentioned the glorification evident in his ministry (v. 4), Jesus concludes with yet another aspect of the glory: *And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began* (v. 5). Here language used of Wisdom (Prov 8:23; Wisdom of Solomon 7:25; Brown 1970:754) is taken up by the incarnate one, who is about to die. Glory now seems to refer to the shining splendor of the divine presence, the “unapproachable light” that Paul mentions (1 Tim 6:16). Nevertheless, it still retains the element of love. For the Son is asking that, through the glorification of the cross, resurrection and ascension, he may return to where he was before, beside (*para*; NIV, *with*) the Father (cf. vv. 2, 24; 1:18, H. C. G. Moule 1908:40–42). The ineffable mystery of the loving unity of the Godhead is here revealed to us once again.

Jesus Begins His Prayer for the Eleven Disciples by Describing Their Situation (17:6–11)

The opening verses have focused on the glory of the Father and the Son, but they have also included the disciples, and to them Jesus now turns more directly. He comments on his work among them, their response and the relation they now have with the Father and the Son in contrast to the world’s.

As in verse 4, Jesus again speaks as if his ministry is complete: “I revealed [*ephanērōsa*, aorist] your name [cf. NIV margin] to those whom you gave me out of the world” (v. 6). Revealing the name could point specifically to Jesus’ use of the I AM (Dodd 1953:417; Brown 1970:755–56), but in any case it certainly means to make manifest the person and character of God (cf. 1:12). Thus, revealing the name is similar to revealing the glory, and, like the glorification, it will not be complete before Jesus’ death. The manifestation through teaching has been completed, but the climactic revelation through death and resurrection yet remains.

The disciples were given to Jesus by the Father from the world, another reference to the amazing grace of God. The Father is the ultimate agent in the disciples' lives just as he is in Jesus' life. Jesus states the pattern of relations very succinctly: *They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word* (v. 6). What does it mean that they were God's? Some would see here a reference to predestination (Barrett 1978:505)—they were the Father's through "the eternity of election" (Calvin 1959:139). But Paul, who develops this specific theme, writes that the election "before the creation of the world" is in Christ (Eph 1:4). If our text referred to this election it would seem to drive a wedge between the Father and the pre-existent Son, a false inference from this text (vv. 9–10; cf. Chrysostom *In John* 81.1; Augustine *In John* 106.5). Jesus is probably speaking not of an eternal relation but of a relation within salvation history, that is, the relation the disciples had with God through the covenant with Israel (Westcott 1908:2:246; Ridderbos 1997:551–52). Those true Israelites (1:47), who had an affinity with God (8:47), were already God's and were awaiting his Messiah, who would bring them to the fulfillment of that relationship. The Father gave them to the Son for this purpose; and through their faith and obedience, as they were drawn by God to the Son and his teaching (6:44–45, 60–66), they demonstrated that they were God's. This relationship is about to be changed radically, for the disciples are now on the brink of the birth from above. Thus, the disciples were already of the Father—there was an affinity—just as the opponents were of their father, the devil (8:42–47). This interpretation leads us to ask why some had (and have) an affinity for God and some do not, why some, but not others, have hardness of heart that alienates them from the life of God (cf. Eph 4:18). Since both divine grace and human responsibility are mentioned together in this Gospel, the answer probably lies in some combination of the two, a combination that eludes our full understanding.

The point here, however, is that true Israelites whom God has shepherded have been handed over by him to Jesus, and the sheep have recognized his voice and have received Jesus as come from God. In doing so *they have obeyed* ["kept," *tetērēkan*] *your word* (v. 6). This is the only such reference in John to keeping the Father's word. Most interpreters think this refers to keeping Jesus' word, which is God's word. Jesus will speak of that soon (vv. 8, 14), but here he is probably saying that the disciples obeyed the Father's voice, which was drawing them to Jesus, and that Jesus in turn passed on to them the revelation of the Father.

Jesus does then address the disciples' response to himself (vv. 7–8). These disciples, who are of God and are given by God to the Son, have been able to recognize and receive as from the Father all that the Son has received from the Father and passed on to them (v. 7). The specific reference is to Jesus' teaching, which they have received. Jesus' words are God's words, and these bring life and judgment (3:34; 6:63, 68; 12:48; 14:24; 17:14). Thus, Jesus' teaching has been grounded on his own identity as the Son sent from the Father. Accordingly, these disciples have been given *to the Son*; the focus is on him and their acceptance of him. They knew for certain that he came from the Father, and they believed that the Father sent him. So they knew and believed the truth about both the Son and the Father in their mutual relation.

Jesus picks up the affirmation spoken by disciples (16:30) just minutes before he began his prayer. Their knowledge and faith are not as complete as they think it is, but Jesus affirms they have reached a decisive point. They have believed in him and hung in with him, even when most of his followers abandoned him (6:60–69). There is still an enormous amount they do not know, and Jesus told them as much when he promised them the Paraclete to instruct them (14:26; 16:13). But the foundation has been laid, and it is secure. They have been receptive, the fundamental attitude of a true disciple, and now they have grasped the crux of the revelation—

the identity of the Son in relation to the Father. The grace of revelation has been met with by human response of humble openness, faith and obedience. Jesus' affirmation of these disciples should be tremendously encouraging to present-day disciples. Here we see God's acceptance of believers despite their great ignorance and weakness.

The disciples' relation to God has enabled them to recognize the Son and believe in him. It is for these believers—and not the world, which has rejected Jesus—that he is now praying (v. 9). Jesus' frank statement *I am not praying for the world* may sound as though he has nothing to do with the world, and it has even led some to think he only ever prays for the elect (Calvin 1959:140–41). But, in fact, he does go on to pray for the world (vv. 21, 23)! So here he means the petitions that follow about protection, sanctification and union with God are prayers only for the disciples (cf. Alford 1980:877). None of these petitions are applicable to the world, to the system and those beings in rebellion against God. Since it is through the disciples' witness that the world will continue to be challenged with God's love and call, Jesus' prayer for his disciples is actually an indirect prayer for the world (Beasley-Murray 1987:298).

Jesus repeats his earlier description of the disciples (v. 6) but changes it subtly. These disciples are those the Father has given the Son—*for they are yours*. They were the Father's before he gave them to the Son, and they remain the Father's after he gives them to the Son. The next verse (v. 10) explains how this can be: *All I have is yours, and all you have is mine*. Here is the fundamental truth of this Gospel—the oneness of the Father and the Son—expressed in terms of possession. The disciples' very relations with the Father and Son bear witness to this foundational truth. They have been given to the Son and yet remain the Father's because of the divine oneness. Here, as throughout this Gospel, Jesus' deeds and words make no sense unless one realizes he is God. Indeed, this very statement bears witness to this claim. For anyone can, and should, truthfully say to the Father, *all I have is yours*. But the reverse, *all you have is mine*—“this can no creature say before God” (Alford 1980:878). The *glory* that Jesus says *has come to him through them* comes from both the Father and the disciples. In the Father's giving the disciples to Jesus, the Father bore witness to this relation of oneness; and the disciples, who were of the Father, recognized him and believed in him.

So we see that the mutual glorification between the Father and the Son for which the Son is praying (v. 1) has already occurred on one level. But now Jesus looks to the time when the Son is taken from them and they are left in the world (v. 11a). The relation that has begun must now be maintained in this new situation; and the glory that has begun must come to completion in divine oneness (v. 22) and then eventually, in yet another stage, in the fullness of the revelation of the glory of Son (v. 24). The world and the evil one would like to thwart these plans, so Jesus now turns to pray for his disciples in the situation they are about to face.

Jesus Prays for the Eleven Disciples (17:11–19) Jesus prays first for God to protect the disciples by his name, which he has given to Jesus (v. 11; the NIV adds *power*). Many interpret this as referring to Jesus' revelation of the Father, and therefore the petition is that they remain loyal to what Jesus has revealed of God (for example, Beasley-Murray 1987:299). This is certainly true, and, indeed, Jesus' very address to God in this verse, *Holy Father*, captures much of that revelation. While God is commonly known as the Holy One, the expression *Holy Father* is not found anywhere else in the Bible. Holiness refers to divine otherness, the realm of the divine in contrast to the mundane. Thus, this phrase captures beautifully God's “purity and tenderness” (Westcott 1908:2:250), the “transcendence and intimacy characteristic of Jesus' personal attitude to God and of his teaching about God” (Beasley-Murray 1987:299).

But more is involved than just the revelation of God, for the goal of keeping them in the Father's name is *that they may be one as we are one* (v. 11). This oneness, as will be made clear soon (vv. 21–23), is not merely a unity of thought among those who receive the teaching of Jesus. It is a matter of shared life. So *name* here refers not just to the revelation, but to the reality that has been revealed—the Father himself. The *name* is the point of contact between Christ and his disciples in the Father. “God’s Name is His revelation of Himself” (Lloyd 1936: 230). When he says (again speaking from an eternal perspective) *while I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me* (v. 12), he is referring to the protection they had by his own divine presence among them as the I AM. Jesus is asking God to continue to protect them by his powerful presence, a presence that will be mediated by himself and the Spirit, as he has taught in the farewell discourse (13:31—17:26).

If Jesus protected them, why did Judas fall away into *destruction* (v. 12)? Judas’s failure to find life would raise questions for the disciples about Jesus’ ability to protect them. Jesus points to two explanations for what happened to Judas. First, his action fulfilled the scriptural pattern of the enemy of the righteous sufferer (for example, Ps 41:9, which was referred to in Jn 13:18 regarding Judas). This does not mean Judas was locked into some deterministic plan but rather “Jesus knew himself to be one with, and had to go the way of, the threatened people of God in the world to fulfill their God-given task” (Ridderbos 1997:553–54). Thus, Jesus finds an assurance in the Scripture of the same sort he is offering his disciples, for they also are the threatened people of God.

The other explanation regarding Judas concerns Judas’s own character as “the son of destruction” (NIV, *the one doomed to destruction*). While this expression can have the sense of indicating one’s destiny, as the NIV takes it (cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:299), its basic idea is “to denote one who shares in this thing or who is worthy of it, or who stands in some other close relation to it” (Bauer, Gingrich and Danker 1979:834). In Ephesians, for example, the expression “sons of disobedience” (2:2, RSV) is explained in terms of actions that flow from an inner disposition (2:3). So also here the reference is primarily to Judas’s own character. The text reads, literally, “no one was destroyed [*apōleto*] except the son of destruction [*apōleias*].” Judas had heard the words and seen the deeds and even been the recipient of special signs of love from Jesus (see comment on 13:26), but in his heart he was not of the Father (cf. 17:6) and so did not receive with humility, faith and obedience the one sent from the Father. When one rejects the offer of life one is left only with destruction. The tree became known by its fruit. Jesus offered life to Judas, but he did not force Judas to accept it, for he does not force anyone’s acceptance (cf. Chrysostom *In John* 81.2). The disciples have confidence because this same offer is made to them, as it is to everyone, and they have responded and received. Jesus is saying these things in the world, that is, in the arena of conflict, so that his disciples can have *the full measure of his joy within them* (v. 13). This joy comes from total confidence in the Father and in his protection as well as in the intimate communion with him such as Judas lacked.

While he was with the disciples Jesus kept and guarded them (v. 12) and gave them God’s word (v. 14). This is the word that both comes from God and is about God. The same expression was used earlier (v. 6) to refer to the Father’s own word, but here it is his word as expressed through Jesus (cf. vv. 7–8). This word of God sets them apart from the world and causes the world to hate them, *for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world* (v. 14), a point he repeats for emphasis (v. 16). Again, Jesus is speaking from the eternal perspective, for the disciples’ removal from the world is not complete until they have received the birth from above

(1:13; 3:3–8). Already they are hated by the world because of their association with Jesus, and the world's hatred will only increase as their association becomes union.

Having spoken of what he has done for the disciples while with them Jesus returns to his request that the Father keep them (v. 11b), which he now specifies in two ways. First, this protection is to be in the midst of the world, not through removal from it (v. 15). In their identification with Jesus they draw upon themselves the world's hatred of him, but they also share in his mission to the world, as will be spelled out shortly (v. 18). Second, the protection is *from the evil one* (v. 15). Behind this world, which hates them, is the evil one, for "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19). The warfare motif runs throughout Scripture (cf. Boyd 1997) and is fundamental in Jesus' own understanding of reality.

Although Jesus is about to complete his work of salvation, God's warfare with the world will continue. Neither the Father nor the Son is going to abandon the world; rather they will continue to engage it, confront it and call it to repentance. "The disciples' place in the world is not something that they can give up because the world is not something that God can give up" (Ridderbos 1997:558). In some Christian circles today there is a healthy sense of this antagonism between the world and the people of God, though sometimes believers need to bring to this antagonism more of God's love for the world. Also, some forms of monasticism can be a direct contradiction to the Lord's will as it is expressed here, though at its best monasticism is a confrontation with the world. In other Christian circles this view of the world is unpopular, for there human culture is seen as an expression of God's word through his immanent Spirit. While God is active in culture, this latter view often leads to new revelations that contradict the revelation in Jesus and in the Scriptures as the Spirit has instructed the church. A passage such as the present one has "a message for an era that becomes naively optimistic about changing the world or even about affirming its values without change" (Brown 1970:764).

Jesus' second great petition is that the Father *sanctify* the disciples (v. 17). Sanctifying is not the same as the cleansing (13:10; 15:3), but it is related to the pruning (15:2). The word used here (*hagiazō*) is related to the word "holy" (*hagios*) that Jesus has just used of the Father (v. 11). It means to consecrate, to set apart. It is used for the preparation necessary for entering the presence of God (Ex 19:10, 22) and for the commissioning for a divine task, for example, that of a priest (Ex 28:41; 40:13) or a prophet (Jer 1:5; Sirach 49:7). The whole people of God are set apart for God as a holy nation (Ex 19:6), answering the call to be holy as God is holy (Lev 11:44), in contrast to the foreign nations (2 Macc 1:25–26; 3 Macc 6:3). All three of these nuances are relevant to Jesus' prayer. This sanctification is *by the truth*, that is, God's *word*. Such is a common thought in Jewish sources (Schnackenburg 1982:185), but here this *word* is Jesus' revelation of God in word and deed (cf. 15:3). Jesus is himself the Word (1:1), as he is the truth (14:6). God's word and truth correspond to what has already been referred to in this prayer as God's glory and name. They are all manifestations of God that point to and actually enable contact with him in and through Jesus. As the disciples share in God's glory (v. 22) and are in his name (v. 11), so here this sanctification means being drawn "into the truth, into the unity between Father and Son, and into salvation in such a way that the Father's being, his holiness, permeates them" (Tolmie 1995:225).

Because the disciples have God's truth they are set apart and sent into the world, just as Jesus was (v. 18). Like him they are to be in the world but not of it, judging and calling the world by being the presence of God's light, bearing witness to his love and offering his life in the midst of the world. They share in the very life of God in the Son of God through the Spirit of God, and thus they do the work of God as Jesus has done, revealing God's love and life and light. In this

way, all three aspects of sanctification are evident: they are set apart to enter God's presence, indeed, to have his presence enter them; they are commissioned for holy service; and they constitute the holy people of God, restored Israel, who are distinct from all others in the world because of the divine presence.

Jesus concludes this section of his prayer with another reference to sanctification (v. 19), which draws out yet another nuance of the term and takes us to the heart of his work and the life to which he calls his disciples. When he says *for [hyper] them I sanctify myself*, he alludes to the consecration of sacrificial animals (Ex 13:2; Deut 15:19, 21) and so speaks of his coming death as a sacrifice (see comment on 10:11; cf. 1:29; 10:11, 15; 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16, Hoskyns 1940b:595–99; Schnackenburg 1982:187). It is the same theme as that found in the accounts of the Last Supper when Jesus says, “My body ... for [hyper] you” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24) and “My blood ... for [hyper] many” (Mk 14:24; cf. Beasley-Murray 1987:301). Thus sanctification, like glorification, includes a reference to the cross, the moment of revelation when the truth of God—his heart of sacrificial love—is most clearly seen. The cross is the ultimate revelation of the truth, and thus his sacrificial death is necessary if the disciples are to be *truly sanctified*, an expression that could also be translated “sanctified in the truth” (*en alētheia*; cf. v. 17, *en tē alētheia*). The cross is also the final and supreme act of Jesus' humility, obedience and death to self that have characterized his whole ministry and are at the heart of his relation with God. So his sacrificial death not only takes away the sins of the world (1:29) and reveals God; it also completes the pattern of life that he will share with them. For the disciples are to have their life in Christ, as branches are in a vine, thus sharing in his very life with the Father, which includes a death of self. They will live out the life of Christ by receiving life from the Father and by dying to self and the world (cf. Rom 12:1). And at the end, after walking as Jesus walked (1 Jn 2:6), their deaths, like Jesus', will also be a glorification of the Father (cf. Jn 21:19). Both sacrificial living and dying, whether by martyrdom or not, are part of the disciples' sanctification (cf. Chrysostom *In John* 82.1).

As the disciples bear witness to God in this way they will produce followers of God, just as Jesus has done. So the themes of consecration and sending lead naturally to the next section of the prayer, Jesus' petition for those who will believe as a result of the disciples' witness.

Jesus Prays for All Who Believe in Him Through the Witness of the Eleven (17:20–24)

Jesus now prays for all believers that which he has prayed for the eleven (vv. 20, 22a). His ultimate purpose in his requests is that all may be one (vv. 21a, 22b–23a) so, in turn, the world may believe (v. 21b) and know (v. 23b) that the Father sent the Son. Jesus then adds the request that all believers may be with him in heaven to see his glory (v. 24).

Jesus' disciples are described by him as *those who will believe in me through their message* (v. 20).^{*} All later belief, Jesus implies here, is to come through the apostolic word (Alford 1980:880), thereby showing that the apostolic foundation of the church (cf. Mt 16:18; Eph 2:19–20; Rev 21:14) was the will of Christ himself. This Gospel does not speak much of the twelve apostles as such (6:67), but important truths about them are conveyed, especially in the farewell discourse, which is addressed to them. Most importantly, they are the chief witnesses to Jesus (cf. 15:27), as we see here.

* **17:20** The present tense can function as a future, so the NIV translation of the present *pisteuontōn* as *will believe* is not impossible, but it obscures another instance of Jesus' eternal perspective in this prayer.

What follows is usually seen as the content of Jesus' prayer for all disciples—*that all of them may be one* (v. 21)—as it is in the NIV. The word *that* (*hina*) is used this way quite often, but it also frequently signals purpose. Jesus uses this same language in two other places in this prayer (vv. 11, 22), both times clearly indicating purpose, which suggests he intends this meaning here as well (Ridderbos 1997:559; cf. Alford 1980:880). The content of Jesus' prayer for all believers, then, would be the same as the content of his prayer for the eleven, namely, that they be kept and sanctified by God (vv. 11–19), through God's name (vv. 11–12), word (v. 14) and truth (v. 17), which they have received through Jesus. He now summarizes using yet another parallel term when he says *I have given them the glory that you gave me* (v. 22; cf. Schnackenburg 1982:192). Like the other terms, *glory* refers to the revelation of God in all his beauty of being and character. But, also like the other terms, *glory* is a manifestation of God himself—not just a revelation about him, but his actual presence (cf. Ex 33:18–23). Jesus shares in this glory as the eternal Son (vv. 5, 24), and he has now given (*dedōka*, perfect tense, another pointer to the eternal perspective of Jesus in this prayer) this glory to his disciples. In part this refers to his revelation of the Father, which he has made known to his disciples; but this revelation brings them the knowledge that is a participation in God's own eternal life (v. 3). Accordingly, Jesus says he has done all of this, here summarized as his giving of the divine glory, in order that they might share in the divine oneness.

In the first century there was a widespread belief among Jews, Greeks and Romans in the unity of humanity. Various sources for this unity were suggested, including the concept of one God, the recognition of one universal human nature, the recognition of a universal law and the notion of one world (Taylor 1992:746–49). Efforts were made to embody this unity. For example, Alexander the Great had set out to unite the inhabited world, and later the Romans picked up the same goal. On a smaller scale, the members of the community at Qumran referred to themselves as “the unity,” which included a unity with the angels, thus linking heaven and earth (Beasley-Murray 1987:302). So Jesus' prayer would speak to an issue of great interest, but the oneness he refers to is distinctive in its nature from other notions of unity. It is grounded in the one God, as were some other views of unity (Taylor 1992:746), but also in himself and his own relation with the one God. He claims to offer the unity that many were desiring, but this unity is grounded in his own relation with his Father. Furthermore, he says that the band of disciples there in the room with him is the nucleus of the one unified humanity.

Jesus speaks of the oneness of all believers (*that all of them may be one*, v. 21) and then links this with the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. The NIV has this indwelling as the model for the relationship among believers: *just as you are in me and I am in you*. The word translated *just as* (*kathōs*) can signal not only comparison but cause. Both of these two meanings are appropriate here, for the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son is both the reason that all may be one and the pattern for such oneness. This becomes clearer when Jesus adds “that they themselves also may be in us” (v. 21; the NIV makes this a new sentence). The oneness of believers is to be found *in us*, in their relation to the Father and the Son. The same twofold thought occurs when Jesus repeats *that they may be one as [kathōs] we are one* (v. 22). The oneness of the Father and the Son is both the cause of and the model for the believers' unity.

The Father and the Son's oneness has been mentioned earlier (10:30) and has been implicit in all that Jesus has said and done. This oneness includes both a unity of being and a distinctness of person, and it has been seen especially as a oneness of will and love. These are also the characteristics of the oneness that Jesus desires for his disciples to have in their relationship with one another in God. The picture of the relation believers have with one another and with God

becomes clear when the various expressions are compared (see figure 1). This oneness is made possible through two types of mutual indwelling—the believers in the Son and the Son in them (14:20; 15:4–5) as well as the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son (10:38; 14:10–11; 17:21). These two types are combined to explain the believers’ living in God: on the one hand, the believers are in the Son, who is in the Father (14:20; cf. Col 3:3); on the other hand, the Father is in the Son, who is in the believers (Jn 17:23). The believers’ point of contact in both cases is the Son. Nowhere in this Gospel is it said that the Father is in believers or that believers are in the Father. The believers have a mutual indwelling with the Father, but only by the Son, for no one comes to the Father except through the Son (14:6). So the oneness of the Son with the Father is unique (1:14, 18), for Jesus shares in the deity of the Father. But in the Son believers have access to the Father and share in his very life, the eternal life.

Jesus seems to suggest that the actual outworking of the believers’ oneness with one another in the Father through the Son is a process that will take some time, for he adds, *may they be brought to complete unity* (v. 23).^{*} More literally, he says, “may they have been perfected into one.” The perfect tense is used, suggesting once again Jesus’ eternal perspective as he prays. He is speaking, in part, about the oneness that is further perfected as the “other sheep” (10:16) and the “scattered children of God” (11:52) are gathered in. But this oneness must also refer to the oneness that is present throughout the life of the community as the community makes “every effort to *keep* the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3), for it is something that the world can notice. So this is a spiritual oneness that comes from God, but it has to do with how the community of believers lives in the world.

Believers in the Son and the Son in the believers (14:20; 15:4–5).

The Son in the Father and the Father in the Son (10:38; 14:10–11; 17:21)

The two types of mutual indwelling combined

Figure 1. Mutual Indwelling

Indeed, Jesus says the purpose of this oneness is *that the world may believe that you have sent me* (v. 21). Such belief is the key response Jesus has received from his disciples (v. 8), so this is a reference to those who are still in the world yet are becoming believers. To believe that the Father sent Jesus is to accept that the Father is as Jesus has revealed him to be and that Jesus is the one way to the Father. When Jesus repeats this purpose he changes the term from *believe* to *know* (v. 23), again echoing his earlier description of the disciples (v. 8). Because this

^{*} **17:23** This same Christocentric focus is evident in Paul’s prayer that his readers “be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19b, NRSV), for this fullness is to be found in Christ (Col 2:9), as the context of Paul’s prayer suggests (Eph 3:18–19a). The reference in 2 Peter to our being partakers of the divine nature (1:4) refers, as the context makes clear, to sharing in God’s moral holiness and immortality (1:3–4), using terms very similar to those in this Gospel.

knowing is parallel to believing, Jesus does not refer to some mere intellectual recognition of the fact that the Father sent the Son, but rather to the knowledge that is eternal life (v. 3).

Thus, the disciples are sent on mission just as Jesus was sent (v. 18), and the very purpose of their life together is to bear witness to the Father and the Son. This oneness flows from a common life that is characterized chiefly by love, and thus the world will see that the Father has loved the disciples as he has loved the Son (v. 23). In other words, the amazing transcendent love evident between the Father and the Son is not an exclusive glory that humans must be content only to admire from afar. The love the Father has for Jesus is the same love he has for believers, indeed for the whole world (3:16). For “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16), and “there is only one love of God” (Brown 1970:772). The believers are to embody this love and thereby provide living proof of God’s gracious character, which is his mercy, love and truth. They will be an advertisement, inviting people to join in this union with God. The love of God evident in the church is a revelation that there is a welcome awaiting those who will quit the rebellion and return home. Here is the missionary strategy of this Gospel—the community of disciples, indwelt with God’s life and light and love, witnessing to the Father in the Son by the Spirit by word and deed, continuing to bear witness as the Son has done.

A great deal has been written about this passage regarding the meaning and implications of this oneness for the church (cf. Staton 1997). The main points in the text seem to be that this oneness is a spiritual reality, derived from sharing in the divine life of the Father and the Son and embodied in a particular community of human beings such that it can be evident to unbelievers. In other words, it is a sacrament, a reality in the human sphere participating in the divine sphere. So this is not simply some invisible church, although the actual institutional structure of this community is not discussed beyond the reference to the apostles’ word (v. 20). The actual lack of unity among Christians throughout history, both between groups of Christians and within groups, tempts a believer to despair and holds Christ up to contempt by the world. Jesus’ prayer shows that there can be no oneness apart from him, yet Christians disagree on who Jesus is and how one is to relate to him! This oneness clearly must come from God and is not something people of goodwill can manufacture. It is predicated on sharing in the divine glory (v. 22) and name (v. 26). Oneness can only come through being born from above, hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd and accepting the witness of the Paraclete, thereby revealing the glory of the Father within history.

This oneness is to take place in history in order that the world can continue to be confronted with a witness to the Father. Jesus’ last petition, however, looks beyond this life to heaven (v. 24). Jesus is returning to the Father, and now he prays for *those you have given me*, repeating again the fact that these are his disciples only because of the Father’s will (cf. vv. 2, 6, 9). This expression is more literally translated as “that which you have given me,” another use of the neuter singular to speak of his disciples as a unit (see note on v. 2; cf. 6:37, 39; perhaps 10:29), which is particularly appropriate after his referring to their oneness. But the band of disciples is not a faceless group; it is composed of beloved individuals who each are indwelt by the Son (15:5), and so he immediately uses the masculine plural pronoun for them (*kakeinoi*; left out of the NIV). In this way the grammar captures both the oneness of the community and the distinct individuals within the one community.

He whose will is one with God’s will now expresses that will when he says *I want*. What he wants is this community of individuals to be with him where he is. So those who are “in” him are also to be “with” him, again recognizing the distinction of persons. Union with God is not homogenization. Jesus’ request that they be with him raises interesting questions, since as divine

Son he is present everywhere (cf. Augustine *In John* 111.2). But the connection with Jesus' earlier teaching about returning to take them to be with him where he is (14:1–3) suggests strongly he is referring to heaven. This being the case, his prayer takes in the whole span of the believers' life, from then on into eternity. Specifically, he wants them *to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world*. We have already seen his glory (v. 22; 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6), but there is a yet more complete vision of his glory awaiting believers. John later says that at his coming "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2; cf. Col 3:4). What begins at his second coming will continue on, for Jesus is talking not about his coming itself but about that which takes place afterwards. He has promised Peter, and, through him, his other disciples that they will follow him later (13:36), and here is what they will meet, the glory of the Lord—the glory that comes from the Father, who is the source of all, and that is a gift of love. That which Jesus has revealed in his earthly ministry is a mere glimpse of an eternal reality that existed before creation. In his prayer, Jesus has been speaking of the future from an eternal perspective. Here in his final petition he looks on ahead to the ultimate future.

Jesus Concludes His Prayer with a Summary and a Pledge (17:25–26) Having looked ahead to the glory of heaven, Jesus returns to the present situation, though he sees it from his eternal perspective. Jesus summarizes the results of his ministry thus far: both his rejection by the world and his acceptance by the disciples. All the verbs in verse 25 are in the aorist tense, which, in the form used here, usually refers to the past. The NIV adopts a rarer use of the aorist and translates them in the present tense, a translation that is possible but that misses Jesus' eternal perspective.

Jesus begins with the bad news: the world did not know, or recognize, the Father. In contrast (*though, kai*), the good news is Jesus knew the Father and his disciples knew that the Father sent the Son. In contrast with the world's ignorance of the Father is not the disciples' knowledge of the Father, but their knowledge of the Son as sent by the Father. Again we see the primacy of Jesus' role. It is precisely in and through the Son that they know the Father, for the Son has made known (*egnōrisa*, aorist) to them the Father's name (v. 26). Earlier in the prayer (vv. 6, 11–12) the name was an expression for the revelation brought by the Son that actually brings contact with God and not just information about him.

Jesus then pledges to continue to make the Father's name known to his disciples in the future. On one important level he refers here to his imminent Passion and resurrection, for these events are the climax of his revelation of the Father, which shows most clearly the love of God. On another level he is speaking of his continued presence among the believers and his continued revelation of the Father to them after his ascension. He is repeating his promise to be with them in his resurrection appearances (14:18–20) and beyond (14:21). His continued revelation parallels the activity of the Paraclete (16:12–15, 25).

The purpose of Jesus' making God's name known to them is not that they would have information about God, but that they would have intimacy *in order that the love you have (ēgapēsas*, another aorist) *for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them* (v. 26). In his ministry he revealed the Father's love for them (v. 23), and in the future he will continue to help his disciples actually receive this love within each of them and amongst them as a community. But again, he himself is the point of contact. It is precisely by his being in them that they will receive the love of the Father, for it is the Father's love for the Son that they are enabled to share. The Son's coming to earth brought the presence of God's love, and his coming into the lives of believers also brings that love, for God is love. Our relationship with the Father will always be

mediated through the Son, even in eternity. Meditation on such truths begins to give us a faint glimpse of the Father's glorifying the Son and the Son's glorifying the Father (v. 1). It also helps us understand why, in this final section of the prayer, Jesus addresses his Father as *righteous* (v. 25). All that Jesus has done and all that he will continue to do are in response to God's righteous will. He is *righteous* because he is truth itself and does only what is right. His purposes are perfect, reflecting his own characteristic life and light and love.¹

¹ Whitacre, Rodney A. *John*. Vol. 4. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999. Print. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series.