

The Lord's High Priestly Prayer (2)

John 17:11-26

John 17:11-26 - *“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ¹² While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*

¹³ *But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

¹⁵ *I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*

²⁰ *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

²⁴ *“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶ And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”*

Background Notes

John 13-16 is the account of our Lord's Upper Room Discourses. These chapters contain His farewell teaching and His intercessory prayer for His followers.

John 17 is the High Priestly prayer of our Lord, which follows the discourses. The prayer is primarily an intercessory prayer - for the apostles and for all the believers who would follow the apostles. *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word...”* - and that certainly includes us! What an encouragement this prayer should be for each one us!

“But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (v13). The Lord prayed this prayer aloud so that the disciples would hear it, and be encouraged, and have the Lord's joy in themselves. The result is the Lord's joy being fulfilled in us as well!

Furthermore, this intercessory prayer is an example of the kind of intercessory prayers the Lord is praying for us today. Hebrews 7:25 says that **the Lord Jesus is alive and He is always interceding for us**: *“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”*

Notice that all of the petitions of this prayer are for spiritual blessings. We need to remember that **spiritual blessings** are far more valuable than **earthly honors** or **material blessings**! Therefore, you see, this prayer should guide us as how we should pray when we make intercessory prayers for other believers, and when we present our personal requests to God.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. The Lord’s prayer was for the protection of His own followers.

“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (v11). Keep them. Preserve them. Protect them. Protect and preserve them from what?

The Lord asked that His followers would be protected from the evil *world system*, and from *Satan*, the evil one who is behind the world system. Remember, the word translated “world” here is **not** the material universe that God created. No, it is the *evil satanic world system* that is opposed to God and to Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 15: *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”* While the Lord was here on this earth, He kept and protected His disciples: *“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name” (v12).* But now the Lord was leaving, and He prayed that His followers would be protected from satanic attack, and from the corrupt and evil world system.

“I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (v14). The disciples would be **in** the world, but not **of** the world, and the world would hate them because they were not of this world.

That is our position today, isn’t it? We are **in** the world, but we are not **of** the world. And because we are not of this world, those who are involved in the world system will hate us.

The Lord made the same point back in John 15:19 - *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”* But there is protection for us from this evil world system, and from Satan, the evil one behind the world system, because the Lord is always praying for the protection of His own.

2. The Lord’s prayer was for the sanctification of His own followers.

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (v17-19).

“Sanctify” means *“to set apart for holy use.”* The method by which we are sanctified, or set apart for holy use, is by the **truth**. *“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.”* The truth is embodied in the Word of God. And we can be effective witnesses only when we are sanctified. *“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (v18).*

What did the Lord mean when He said, *“for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth”* in verse 19? The Lord didn’t need to be “sanctified,” did He? He was speaking about going to the cross. He was “set apart” to go to the cross – that was His mission. In other words, He had voluntarily set Himself apart for that holy work of becoming a sacrifice for sin. He voluntarily took upon Himself your sin and my sin - so that it would be possible for us to be sanctified.

“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” The Lord’s prayer was for the sanctification of His own.

3. The Lord’s prayer was for the unity of His own followers.

Verses 21-22: *“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one...”*

The unity of believers received great emphasis in this high priestly prayer of our Lord. He really wants to see us unified! Being "one," or the idea of "unity," does **not** mean "uniformity." Uniformity would mean that we would all have to be the same, exactly alike, with no diversity of tastes and personalities. The Lord created us as very different people. He doesn’t expect us to become “uniform”!

And the unity that the Lord desires to see in us is not an institutional union or an ecumenical union that is imposed upon all members.

The fact of the matter is that we are one! The Lord’s prayer was answered with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when the Church was formed. **All believers around the world are one in the Lord!**

Now it’s our job to **recognize** that unity - and **keep** that unity! Ephesians 4:3 says that we are to *“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* And Philippians 2:2-4 tells us how to achieve unity: *“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

Why is unity so important? Look at verse 21: *“...that the world may believe that You sent Me.”* And verse 23: *“that the world may know that You have sent Me.”* It’s really hard for non-Christians to figure out the unity of believers. They just can’t understand it! Our unity is evidence of the love of God in our hearts. It is evidence of the truth about Jesus Christ.

I once worked as a research engineer for a large corporation. My immediate boss was a dedicated non-Christian. One thing he could not get over was that throughout the company, at all levels of the company, there were these people who called themselves Christians - and they had a special bond that went far beyond company loyalty! There was a special love and kindness and unity about this group that he could not understand. And he could not dismiss it!

Unity among us is so important for our testimony, and the Lord prayed for **that unity** in John 17. The Lord’s prayer was for the unity of His own.

4. The Lord's prayer was for the joy of His own followers.

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (v24).

Back in verse 13 we saw that the Lord prayed this prayer aloud so that the disciples could hear what He was praying. As a result of hearing His requests, they would be encouraged and have His joy.

Now in verse 24 the Lord prayed: *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

The Lord Jesus wants us to be with Him - and He wants to share His glory with us! How that knowledge should fill us with joy! What joy and peace for our future - not only throughout our daily lives, but also as we near death.

Now look at verse 26: *"And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."* Now that's a lot of love, isn't it? The very love that the Father had for the Son, that same love is available to us! That's amazing – and that should bring us great joy!

The Lord's prayer was for the joy of His own.

Practical Application

Are we "walking the razor's edge"?

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (v15).

The Lord didn't pray that we would be taken out of this world. No! He prayed that we would be **left in** this world, but that we would **not** be **part of** this world!

Now it's not easy to practice this truth and live out this truth in our everyday lives. To be **in** the world, but not **of** the world - that's like walking on a razor's edge. If we lean too far towards the "in the world" direction, we become self-centered and worldly - and that is unbiblical. If we lean too far in the "not of this world" direction, we become Christian hermits, living in some kind of "Bible Town" - and that is not biblical. "Bible Town" - that hypothetical Christian community that's shut off from the world and has no contact with non-Christians? It sounds kind of nice - but it's not biblical! We would be closed off from the people of this world who desperately need to hear the gospel.

We are called to "walk the razor's edge." We are to rub shoulders with the non-Christians in this world, but we're not to become worldly. We can't allow the dust and grime of this world to rub off on us!

We're to be light in this world, so we can't allow the dirt of selfish desires and worldly pursuits to dim that light. We are to be salt in this world, so we can't allow our contact with the world to dilute our saltiness.

We are to be "in" - but not "of" - this world. Are we "walking the razor's edge"?